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Early American Furniture

By

Charles Over Cornelius

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FOREWORD

IN presenting to the public a book on the subject of American Furniture some statement is necessary to define the scheme and scope of such a work.

This, like all specialized subjects, is susceptible of two different treatments, the general inclusive one which surveys the whole field from a particular point of view and the more detailed treatment which takes up small departments of the larger subject. Both of these are essential to a complete and thorough examination and to the growth of a rounded-out knowledge.

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For the second method of treatment, one type of publication is required—the monograph form. That is to say, the expert in a particular limited field upon which he has gathered much special information through research and observation, should present this information in complete detail in a publication dealing with his specialty alone.

In the general study of American furniture this is gradually being done. Special study is being made

Foreword

or has been made of particular periods in the history of the furniture development or of the special attributes of groups of furniture deriving from particular localities. In the case of European furniture and decorative arts, the bibliography of this sort is very large. With the American furniture, such treatments are not so numerous but the list is rapidly growing.

Essential, however, to a balanced view of the whole subject, to the acquirement of a proper sense of values, and to a real conception of the place of such works in the general scheme of human history, is the general treatment which presents in consecutive fashion the whole background of the subject. This gives, then, the framework into which must be set, in their proper places, those detailed treatments of which we have spoken.

This background, so necessary to a complete understanding of the subject, must include a running commentary upon the cultural growth and change of the people which expresses these in artistic forms. Their economic and commercial relations, their social habit and custom are intrinsically a part of this cultural life which find their accurate record in the arts of their daily life, and with them go hand

Foreword

in hand the contributions of the creative artists and the influences from outside which follow the channels of trade.

Such is the point of view from which has been directed the writing of this little volume. The growth in artistic consciousness from a time when utilitarianism predominated over esthetic demands—albeit the esthetic even then refused to be excluded—to the time when a highly organized society expressed itself in sophisticated terms, concurrent with a prosperous economic and commercial life, this story of the changes which overtook the utilitarian art of American furniture design and manufacture constitutes a revealing record of the civilization which lies at the basis of the present United States of America.

The compilation of such a book as this is dependent upon the kind offices of many friends, whether for advice and criticism or for their permission to use as illustrations pieces from their collections. To these the author wishes to acknowledge his great debt and express his appreciation of their continued courtesy and kindness: J. S. J. Beach, Phoenix Benknap, Mr. and Mrs. Harry H. Benkard, Mr. and Mrs. J. Insley Blair, Allan B. A. Bradley, Mr. and

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Mrs. George A. Cluett, William W. Covell, Francis P. Garvan, Mrs. Clarence E. Mix, Mr. and Mrs. Louis G. Myers, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Parish, Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Pierce, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Plant, R. O. Primrose, Henry S. Pyle, Mrs. C. L. F. Robinson, Miss Anne S. Van Cortlandt, Alexander Wall, Dr. Fanuiel S. Weisse. Also to the New York Historical Society, the Essex Institute of Salem, Newport Historical Society and to the authorities of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

In addition to these some special acknowledgment is due to one or two. In common with very many students of the American field, he wishes to confess much obligation to the work and enthusiastic interest of R. T. H. Halsey and to the opportunity created by the gift of the American Wing to the Metropolitan Museum of New York by Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. de Forest.

A particular and utterly inadequate appreciation is expressed to Miss Ruth Ralston whose valued assistance and criticism are especially responsible for much of the character which the book may possess.

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Early American Furniture

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CHAPTER I

THE PERIOD OF DISCOVERY

THE TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND

THE morning of that momentous day broke fine and clear, another day had dawned to add to the anxious vigil, already holding something of despair, which had lasted through two weary months or more. Three days before, ducks had been seen, giving promise of near-by land and justifying the change of course urged by the *Pinta's* commander. Still, in spite of the promise, the horizon had remained unbroken and the *Santa Maria* and her companions sailed steadily forward on the subtropical ocean.

At last the cry of "Land!" At last the long-de-

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layed cloud upon the horizon, and before that memorable day had closed, the banners of the King of Spain had been planted in a new-found land. In shining armor, partially hid by the crimson robe of Admiral of Castile, Christopher Columbus first set foot upon the pleasant beach, bent the knee, unfurled the standard of his kingly patron, and with the royal witnesses claimed this island of San Salvador, as he called it, a possession forever of the Crown of Spain.

Here, then, were the islands which lay off Asiatic India, with the greatest of them, Japan, not far away. Here would be the fabulous land of Cathay with whose wonders Marco Polo had filled the medieval mind. Here had been found that long-sought passage to the Indies with its implication of endless stores of gold, of jewels, and of spices.

Gold and spices! Gold and spices! This was the rallying cry of the medieval adventurers, the desired of every European merchant and of every European prince. How much did the discovery of America on the twelfth of October, 1492, owe to the search for gold and spices, to the dreams of wealth which would ensue from finding a westward passage to the East!



PLATE I

A carved oak chest and a desk-box of the early type
(The tops are pine)

The Period of Discovery

The fifteenth century had marked in Europe the beginning of a complete change in her mental outlook. In Italy the Renaissance was at its height and was rapidly spreading north and west through France and Spain to England and Flanders. Its effects were seen in a change in social and political structure. In most of Europe centralized governments were growing up out of the dispersed feudalism of the Middle Ages and increasing their strength by alliances with powerful neighbors. Manufacture became more and more important with the growth of industrial towns. Navigation took on a new lease of life with the perfecting of the mariner's compass. The invention of printing, perhaps the most important innovation of all times, spread far and wide the influence of the new learning which was inspired by the increased interest in ancient life. Thus were laid the foundations for a wider horizon of thought, a more spacious manner of living, and a greater stimulus toward inquiry and experiment.

This change in the intellectual attitude toward physical things grew at the expense of the ascetic ideal of the Middle Ages, and by the general raising of the standard of living increased tremendously

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the demand for physical luxuries. One natural result of this demand was a very great increase in the products from the hands of artists and craftsmen. The arts of the painter, the sculptor, and the carver developed apace, gradually freeing themselves from the stricter rules of an earlier and hieratic form toward a nearer approach to a realism always conscious of the limitations of traditional formulæ of expression. In the lesser arts of the woodworker, the metal-worker, and the weaver a corresponding effort led to an equally marked development. The wealth of a powerful united church stimulated these artists to their highest endeavors, while an almost equal encouragement came from the increasing wealth of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie.

The continent of Europe was dependent upon the Orient for most of the luxuries to which she was accustomed. The coarse native foods, of small variety and poorly cooked, were rendered palatable by the use of edible spices which contributed very largely to the volume of import. Precious stones for personal adornment or for use in the enrichment of religious furniture or vestments, silks and velvets which were widely employed by nobles and clergy,

The Period of Discovery

perfumes and incense, dyes and drugs, rare woods and other materials for artistic use, all added their share to the heavy and regular traffic from east to west. On the other hand, there was a valuable though lesser export of European goods, iron and tin, woolens and manufactured articles, to the East.

For this reason the great trade routes between the East and the West were of primary importance to the economic life of Europe and in turn to the continuance of that established civilization to which she was becoming accustomed.

It was, therefore, in a search for new routes to the Orient, to fulfil the increasing demands for the luxuries which had virtually become necessities to European life, that the great age of exploration began, leading the discoverer of the Americas to stumble upon the new continent in his effort to find a western way to the Indies and to fabulous wealth. The Portuguese rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, indicating the new eastern route, and Columbus, sailing westward across the Atlantic four years later, discovered the islands of America. It will be readily understood why the first inquiries of Columbus should have had to do with the presence and quantities of gold and spices to be found in the

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new land, and why he was determined to trim his plans in accordance with what was discovered of these precious materials.

His return to Spain was marked by great ovations, his retinue including some Indians from the New World and sailors carrying gorgeous birds, rare plants, and strange animals. Ferdinand and Isabella welcomed their admiral with unusual honor, and to them he told his story of adventure and discovery, giving definite assurance of lands to the westward filled with untold riches.

The sixteenth century, the great age of exploration and adventure, saw no real colonization in the new land, although several attempts were made. The chief incentives of this century were exploration and exploitation, the one made possible by the other. One direct result in Europe of the traffic with the Orient, in which the normal exports from the Continent were insufficient to pay for import from the East, was the drain of precious metals with a concomitant appreciation of gold. This had gone on from the end of the thirteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century, so that the enhanced value of gold, combined with the economic necessity which created its appreciation, was an all-powerful motive

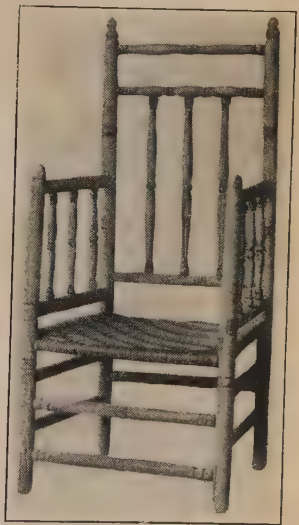


PLATE II

Four seventeenth-century chair types: Carver (upper left), slat-back (upper right), turned spindle and slat (lower left), and an eccentric type resembling the Brewster (lower right)

The Period of Discovery

to the great maritime powers in their voyages of discovery and for gain. The great commercial success of Portugal, with her steady trade in all of the luxuries of the East, at first made the Spanish explorers more and more eager to push westward to the Indian Ocean. But when the returns of gold from the Spanish mines of South America began to suggest the possibilities of boundless treasure by means of which the Portuguese importations could be easily acquired and the depleted supply of specie renewed, the interest shifted to the exploitation of the territory which they had conquered. The English, in their hunt for the northwest passage to India, acquired little gold but gained a knowledge of the vast natural wealth in potential fisheries, in peltry, and in naval stores, including timber and tar products, ready for the taking. Thus the real foundations of modern America were laid in a century which was characterized by unlimited energy, intellectual and physical, by love of adventure and a romantic search for fabulous wealth. Traces of these qualities are not undiscernible in the America of to-day.

In this great change within a century of the main trade routes of the civilized world, the center of

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commerce shifted from the Mediterranean shores to those of the Atlantic, and the nations bordering on it came into a position of powerful economic control. Economic expediency determined the types of colonization adopted by the European nations on the continent of North America. It was in the century after the great period of discovery that the real migration to America began, and it was then that these types of colonization really showed themselves.

The art of Europe during the years immediately preceding and following the discovery of America had reached a very high point of richness and of beauty. With the waning influence of medieval ideals and the growing store of rich material and sophisticated suggestion from Oriental sources, the arts of the wood- and metal-worker, the weaver and the stone cutter took on a surprising magnificence. On the Continent, the blending of the delicate elaboration of the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic with the chaste and exquisite beauty of the high Renaissance reached a perfection in craftsmanship and design which set a standard difficult if not impossible to sustain. This is most clearly seen in the architecture, which governed all the other arts. The Palace

The Period of Discovery

of the Doges in Venice is an outstanding example of the civic work of the first half of the century in Italy. In France the Church of St. Ouen and the Palais de Justice, both at Rouen, suggest the beautiful death of a great style. Such châteaux as those of Blois and Chambord mark the union of the Renaissance use of classic detail with the survival of earlier medieval form.

The superb textiles from the East, brocaded velvets and silks shot with gold and silver,—Asia Minor velvets, Persian and Indian brocades,—presented a richness of color and texture never before achieved, and led in time to emulation by European looms in Italy and Spain. Tapestries and embroideries, the more natural expression of Western art in textile media, took on a reflected glory from the color and design of the East, which was largely made possible by the imported dyes, and the weavers in the Low Countries and France left little to be desired in their accomplishment.

In the cabinet-maker's art the employment of the finer-grained woods than the oak of Gothic usage, of inlay in contrasting material supplementing carving, recall again the exotic influences which were pouring in from the Orient, where inlays in woods,

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ivory, and mother-of-pearl were dexterously handled.

An equal superiority was exhibited in the output of the shops of workers in precious metals—exquisitely wrought utensils for church or private use, in gold, silver, and semi-precious stones, studded with jewels or touched with enamel, and all sorts of intricately wrought jewelry and plate. The art of the iron-maker fell little behind that of the goldsmith, the hard metal taking on forms of the utmost delicacy.

This great tradition of the arts of western Europe, which was to be carried over to the New World, was not a sudden flowering in Europe, but had been of gradual and continuous growth. From ancient Egypt, through Greece and Rome, the impulse of artistic expression had reached Europe, ever and anon quickened by new influences from the eastward. Into whatever lands it spread, it assumed peculiar qualities of race and place which identified it as of a particular nationality. At the same time, as the years went by, certain changes, common to its expression as a whole, took place, due to influences of a particular time. Thus we have two systems for coördinating the arts of any country—

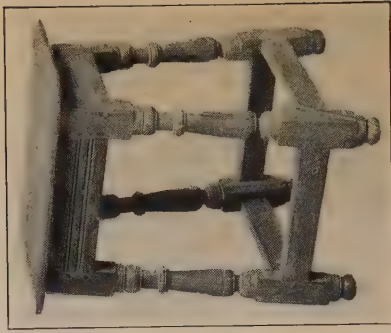
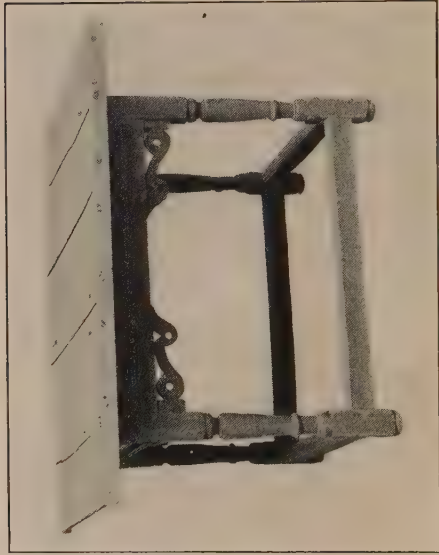
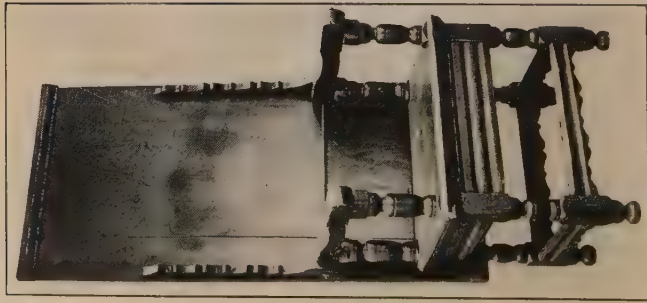


PLATE III

Chair table with drawer under seat, rectangular table, and stool, all with early turnings and moldings run on the rails

The Period of Discovery

the general quality which pervaded the arts at a specific period in their history and the peculiar and special qualities which resulted from a local or national taste.

The contrast, therefore, between the old countries of the western world and the newly discovered continent was all the more marked when referred to the artistic expressions in which each gave voice to her cultural achievements. By the same token the roots of all the culture of the western hemisphere of to-day are sunk deep in the achievements of those older civilizations through whose energy and efforts men of their own breed were settled in the virgin forests of the new-found land, to continue as best they could, in strange environment, the traditions of the civilizations which they had left behind them. When permanent colonization was begun in North America, a very highly developed tradition in the arts and the crafts was waiting to be brought across the seas. With its transplantation to North America another stage of its development was begun under new circumstances of environment which were bound to have their influence upon the external aspects of the arts. How far the possibilities of expression were realized in the new country, how

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far the influences of the new environment expressed themselves in artistic media, we shall see as we examine further both these influences and the arts of the New World.





CHAPTER II

THE TUDOR TRADITION

THE PERIOD OF SETTLEMENT

DIRECTLY continuing the artistic traditions developed in England under the Tudors when the Continental influences of the Renaissance first began to reach that country, the activity of the first fifty years of settlement in America gave opportunity for the expression in familiar terms of the Englishman's taste of the day. In forming a correct impression of the early homes of the colonists, it is difficult to generalize. Within the groups of settlers were represented most of the social classes which made up English life. There were people of all sorts, from the younger sons of noble families, through landed gentry, professional and scholarly groups, artisans, mechanics, and laborers, to yeoman, peasant, and indentured servant. There were various degrees of wealth, even from the begin-

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ning, and the response to opportunities in converting the resources of the new land to financial gain, very rapidly divided the settlements into groups of rich and poor.

To study artistic development in its relation to nationality, the opportunity for expression of personal taste must be sought in the homes of the rich or well-to-do rather than in the homes of the very poor, unless, perchance, there is a distinctive peasant art, and that is not necessarily coincident with poverty. There are, then, two distinct groups of the utilitarian arts, that which leads the way in sophistication of taste and that of provincial origin which interprets in vernacular the general stylistic character of its period or carries on the qualities of an earlier time.

In looking at this first period we must hold in mind that the occupants of the houses were people whose roots lay in England, who were accustomed to life as it was there lived. These people were, for forty or more years, being rapidly augmented by new arrivals, who kept the thought of home warm in all minds and who brought with them some personal possessions with which to begin life anew. These men were Englishmen, not Americans. No



PLATE IV

Oak press cupboard with early carved decoration
(The feet, posts, and brackets are incorrect restorations)

The Tudor Tradition

self-consciousness of a new nationality had come to them from their voyage across the Atlantic. They were members of English families, transplanted to a new land, cherishing in their homesickness any tie which bound them to the mother country. At the same time, the sense of individual freedom which came to them gave them a certain self-reliance and a perspective in their point of view toward home, which readily developed into a desire for political independence under the spur of grievance against the home Government.

With the establishment of the first permanent colonies on the eastern seaboard of North America, the old artistic tradition of western Europe was transferred to a new environment in which it was destined to continue through more than two centuries, responding to new influences, economic and social.

For a proper understanding of the expression of the tastes and preferences of the earliest groups of colonists in America, it is essential to have as a background the European, and particularly the English, development of the arts at the time when these colonists left the mother country.

The first settlements in America were made during

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the reign of King James I, who in 1603 succeeded good Queen Bess upon the throne of England. The state of England throughout the reigns of James and his successor Charles I was much disturbed. Political and religious dissension, closely interwoven, brought about uneasy and trying economic and social conditions. The great Puritan migration of the seventeenth century, which brought twenty-six thousand people to the shores of New England before 1640, was directly a result of these conditions at home,—religious persecution coupled with precarious social and economic life,—while the later Cavalier migration to Virginia, of lesser dimensions, followed upon the supremacy of the Puritan Commonwealth of Cromwell.

It may be well to give a suggestion of how these external conditions of national life affect the artistic expression of the nation. The art-production of any nation depends upon two groups of people—artists whose work is the expression of artistic impulse, and the public of patrons which purchases this work. In addition to this is the more or less indigenous art produced by the people for their own use, in which is included the so-called peasant art. Political upheaval, accompanied as it usually is by

The Tudor Tradition

economic and social disorganization, immediately affects in greater or less degree artistic production. Economic stringency affects the rich patron as violently as social uncertainty has its effect upon the lower classes.

As a corollary to this we can point to the effects of settled political conditions, economic prosperity, and social stability. Under these the artist and his patron do their full share in the movement of supply and demand. Contacts with other lands bring fresh blood and fresh ideas into the country, resulting in changes of taste and style. In the history of the utilitarian arts, and particularly that of furniture design, these effects are most clearly marked.

Just as, in political affairs, England was in a stage of transition, working out her salvation as a nation, so was she in artistic matters. The medieval expression of her love of beauty had been strongly tinged with an indigenous quality. Her Gothic architecture and utilitarian arts had possessed decided national characteristics slow to yield to new ideas.

The influence of the Renaissance in art and letters, spreading from the Mediterranean basin, had during the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth

Early American Furniture

made itself felt to some extent on the island, since these monarchs had maintained close and continuous relations with the Continent. The influence came not only from Italy (Italian artists were working in England in Renaissance forms even before the time of Henry VIII) but also through France and Flanders, both of which laid the impress of their national tastes upon their art.

The Tudor renaissance was restricted chiefly to the habitations of the great. Many superb houses were built and furnished for royalty and for the great nobles of the realm. Its influence, however, had not extended far into the lesser gentry or middle classes, and scarcely at all to the lower group of peasants and yeomen. It is thus that changes of taste developed, beginning at court, spreading amongst the aristocracy, and gradually percolating down through the gentry and middle classes to the peasants. The process was very slow.

This late Gothic or Tudor art it is which lies at the background of the earliest art produced in America. In architecture the simplest form of manor-house or peasant-cottage plan predisposed the arrangement of the American colonists home. This English plan centered about a hall which

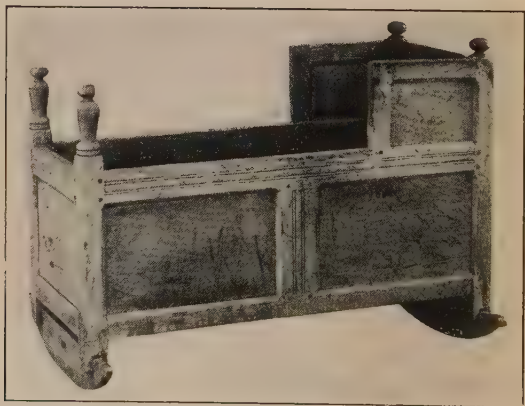
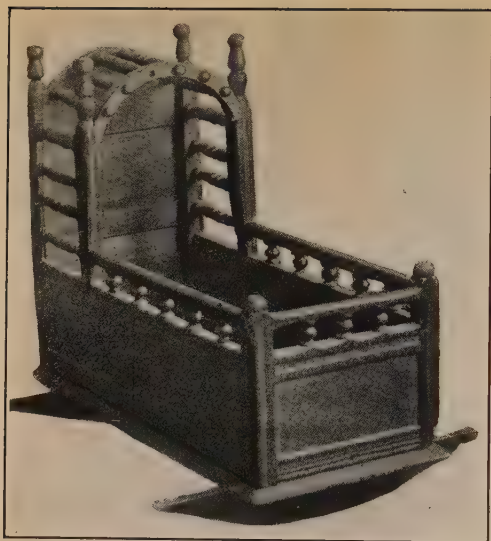


PLATE V

Two cradles, paneled and ornamented with turning; moldings on stiles and rails

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formed the living- and eating-quarters of the house. The hall was usually subdivided by a screen near one end, which formed a passageway to the entrance door. With the hall as the nucleus, rooms were added at each end, kitchen and service quarters at the "screen's" end, masters' rooms at the other. This simple form was elaborated into such great rambling houses as Knole and Penshurst, while in essentials remaining undeveloped in the small houses of the provinces and partially developed in the manor-houses. The construction was of stone or of wood and plaster, and decoration in those materials was proportioned to the wealth or importance of the owner.

The interiors were finished more often than not in oaken wainscoting. The exposed beams of ceilings or the posts of walls were decoratively treated. Chamfering, a bevel or molding softening the lower edges of beams or the corners of posts, lessened their apparent thickness.

The furniture preserved in general the rectangular construction which survived from the churchly furniture of Gothic times. Heavy oak was the usual material and the carved and molded enrichment was appropriate to this tough and coarse-

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grained wood. Paneling was usually made up of rectangular panels fitted between vertical stiles and horizontal rails. These panels were either plain, with moldings worked on the surrounding stiles and rails, or they were carved into decorated surfaces. Color was freely used on the furniture and woodwork—vivid reds, greens, blues, yellows, and black, sometimes picked out with gold; all a Gothic survival.

The furniture forms were few in number. Chairs were very rare and a certain formality was associated with their use well through Elizabeth's day. The couch, or chaise-longue as it is now called, was rarer still. Low chests, cupboards of three kinds—court, press, and livery—served many purposes for storage. Tables, stools, benches, and desk-boxes virtually completed the list. The furniture carried out the same traditions of joinery as the woodwork of the houses, with greater enrichments of carving, of molding, and of applied ornament of wood.

Loose cushions formed the upholstery of the chairs, stools, and benches (or, as they were called, forms), and rich materials in silk weaves, in needle-point and embroidery gave bright, cheerful color.

The metal-work and ceramics, if ornamented,

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employed in their decoration the forms made familiar in architectural use, reduced in scale and somewhat elaborated.

With some portion of this artistic heritage from England the American colonists were familiar. The earliest settlers were, by and large, persons of the lower middle class, yeomen farmers, small tradesmen, and workmen from the towns. A few amongst them, usually the leaders, were gentlemen whose standards of living were higher than the general run. As would naturally be the case, these people would follow the older fashions with which they were familiar, very little of the new Renaissance influence showing itself.

It is surprising to find how soon after the settlement the effort to establish comfortable and pleasant living-quarters was made. By the middle of the century homes of genuine comfort were not unusual in all the colonies, and communication between New and Old England started promptly, with an exchange between the two of useful commodities. We have many contemporary accounts of the advantages of the new land, but these must all be taken with some allowance for the exaggeration natural to men who desire to present their own

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lot as not unenviable and to induce others to follow where they have led. As early as 1622 a cargo ship, which had sailed from London in July, 1621, returned "laden with clapboard, wainscott, and walnut." Letters home were telling of the advantages of Massachusetts. In 1630 Higginson wrote:

It is thought here is good clay to make Bricks and Tyles and Earthen-Pots as needs be. At this instant we are setting a Bricke-Kil on worke to make Bricks and Tyles for the building of our Houses. For Stone, here is plentie of Slates at the Ile of Slate, Masathulets Bay and Lime-stone, Free-stone and smooth-stone and Iron-stone and Marble-stone also in such store that we have great rocks of it and a Harbour hard by our Plantation is from thence called Marble-Harbour.

With abundance of these materials as well as endless supplies of wood, it is little wonder that goodly houses were run up and furniture made. At the same time many of the poorer settlers were living in "wigwams" or huts. Winthrop records in 1630, in the autumn, the burning down of two wigwams belonging to two settlers, one of whom lost all his goods, an example, at this early date, of differences in economic condition. The wigwams re-



PLATE VI

Unusual chest with one drawer, with tulip carving like "Hadley" chests, applied turnings, and inlay

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ferred to were probably huts half excavated in the hillside and roofed with wood. Almost every week in 1631 fires are recorded in Winthrop's journal, since the wattle-and-clay chimneys were continually setting fire to the thatched roofs. Stone buildings, the stones laid in clay, shared with the wood-framed buildings in popularity.

As early as this but little attempt at a complete furnishing can be expected. In March, 1631, Thomas Dudley, Deputy Governor of Massachusetts Bay, tells the Countess of Lincoln that he must "write rudely, having no table, or other room to write in than by the fireside upon my knee, in this sharp winter; to which my family must have leave to resorte, though they break good manners and make me many times forget what I would say and say what I would not." More than a year later we find Winthrop remonstrating with Dudley at the costliness of wainscoting and adorning his house. Dudley explains that it is for the warmth of his home that he does it, and that the cost is little, since he is using only clapboards nailed to the walls to form a wainscot.

Practical reasons rather than esthetic controlled much of the interior finish of the houses, just as the

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practical necessities of living dictated the goods brought over in the valuable cargo space. Of a very large order for provisions and materials for personal use or wear, which Winthrop sends to England to his wife in 1631, there appears not a single item for household adornment or furnishing, unless the "oiled calves skins of the largest" might have been intended for upholstery, since heavy shoes are listed as a separate item. Most of the material for clothes was to be "sad-colored" and some of it red.

For the first ten years it would seem that very little attempt at furnishing per se was made in the Massachusetts colony, the chief effort being to build good houses to start with, to supply the necessities of life, and to prepare for as self-sufficient a community as possible. Some furniture and other utensils were, of course, brought over by each of the settlers, and these formed the basis for work by local artisans.

The story is much the same in Virginia, and the same sort of accounts, perhaps at times exaggerated, but containing much that is accurate, give us a knowledge of the struggle. Of the early settlers (1607) we read:

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. . . Some few hundred of our men were left there by Captain Newport. . . . They built a church and many houses together which they named James Towne. . . . They cut downe wood for wainscot, black or walnut tree, Spruce, Cedar and Deale. They got rich furs, dying stuffe, minerals and iron ore (which made excellent good iron) they planted orange trees, corne and sundry kindes of seeds, they made Sope ashes and tar. . . .

That the possibilities of gain were great in Virginia is proved by the records of George Yeardley, who came there in 1609. Pory in 1619 says: "The Governor here (Yeardley), who at his first coming, besides a great deal of worth in his person brought only his sword with him, was at his last being in London, together with his lady, out of his mere getting here, able to disburse very near three thousand pounds to furnish him with the voyage." In his will, proved February 14, 1628, he leaves to his wife "plate, linen, woollen or any other goods, moveable or immoveable" in his dwelling-house at Jamestown; and, in addition, "negars, catle, etc. . . . here in this country of Virginia, in England or elsewhere, together with my plantation of one thousand acres of land at Stanly in Warwicke River," were to be sold to best advantage for tobacco and the

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same to be turned into money in England. This will typifies many of those of the seventeenth-century colonists of the first generation, who disposed of properties not only in America but in England and the West Indies as well.

Another Virginia settlement is seen in its beginnings in the following narrative of the founding of Henrico. Around 1611-12 we read

that our Colonie consisteth now of seven hundred men at least. . . . The Colonie is removed up the river four-score miles further beyond Jamestown to a place of higher ground. . . . Being thus invited, here they pitch, the spade men fell to digging, the brick men burnt their bricks, the Company cut down wood, the Carpenters fell to squaring out, the Sawyers to sawing, the Souldier to fortifying and every man to somewhat. And to answer the first objection for holesome lodging, here they have built competent and decent houses, the first storie all of bricks that every man may have his lodging and dwelling place apart. . . . Here they were building also an Hospital with forescore lodgings (and beds already sent to furnish them) for the sicke and lame, with keepers to attend them for their comfort and recoverie. . . .

These early records of the beginnings of the colonies give very little evidence of the details of the every-day surroundings of the settlers in their



PLATE VII

Three chests showing types with no drawer, with one drawer, and with two drawers; the first ornamented with carving and turned appliques, the second the so-called "Hadley" type, the third the "Connecticut" chest with tulip and sunflower panels and turned appliques

(Date, latter half of seventeenth century)

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homes. In Virginia, although from 1625 on it was apparent that tobacco-growing would control the economic and social life of the colony, it was not until the second half of the century, when the possibilities of the tobacco plantations had been realized, that wealth began to flow into the country and chiefly into the coffers of the planters. It is thus a little further along in the century, as the first generation of colonists begins to come to an end, that we have a clear light thrown upon the contents of the homes which they left behind them. Quantities of inventories of homes of all types still exist in conjunction with wills, and from these an accurate picture can be conjured up of the comfort and cheer of the seventeenth-century houses of those settlers who formed the first wave of migration to these shores.

Some image of the interiors and their furnishings should be held in mind as we read these ancient lists of household possessions. We should visualize an interior, rather low-ceiled, with a heavy central or summer beam crossing the ceiling. The windows were few and small, single or in groups, set rather high in the wall and filled with leaded glass in small panes. The room was dominated by the great

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open fireplace, in which stood fire-irons and various utensils of iron, brass, and copper. The fireplace walls were sometimes covered with wood or were plastered and whitewashed. The floors were sanded neatly.

Records have come to light in one Massachusetts house which show that a black line painted around the wall at the floor gave a neat finish, this black line carrying back inside the fireplace. The fireplace bricks in such a case were probably whitewashed. Whitewash was much used to cover wood and plaster which had been soiled with use, although the original intention when nicely molded sheathing (a simple substitute for paneling) covered the walls, must have been to leave the wood unfinished or to color it with some sort of earthen paint.

The influence of a different environment gives much of the furniture which filled these rooms a character in most cases unlike its English prototype. In the first place, the local materials produce different and, in general, lighter color effects than the English, particularly in the oak. In the second place, the tools and facilities for work were less complete. In the American pieces we can note an economical use of moldings, less variety in the

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turning and carving, less pretentious motifs attempted. These restrictions on decoration are often an enhancement, much of the effect depending upon good proportion and relation of parts.

None of the elaborate types of furniture, found in the great English houses, seems to have been attempted here. The simple manner of life made them not only unnecessary but inappropriate.

Let us take, for an example a room of a well-to-do Virginia colonist, the furnishing of the chamber of the widow of Captain Adam Thoroughgood of Lynnhaven Bay, Princess Anne County. Captain Thoroughgood died in 1640, and at a Quarter Court held in James City, April 15, 1641, is recorded the inventory of things reserved for Mrs. Thoroughgood's chamber.

Imprimis: one bed with blankets, rug and the furniture thereto belonging, two pairs of sheets and pillow cases; one table with carpet; table cloth and napkins, knives and forks: one cupboard and cupboard cloth two [illegible] one linen, one woollen; six chairs, six stools, six cushions, six pictures hanging in the chamber, one pewter basin and ewer, one warming pan, one pair andirons in the chimney, one pair tongs, one fire shovel, one chair of wicker [probably a chair with a rush or splint seat] for a child. Plate

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for the cupboard: one salt cellar, one bowl, one tankard, one wine cup, one dozen spoons. . . .

For a definite picture of a room of so early a day, this statement is enough. A high bed (for "furniture" implies rich hangings), a table, with its carpet, certainly of a colored material such as damask or needlework, a cupboard, also with its cloth, set out with a handsome array of silver, six stools, six chairs with the cushions probably on the latter, fire-tools (omitting a poker) and andirons, a ewer and basin, and a warming-pan. Six pictures on the walls would suggest a spacious arrangement. The chief lack for a lady's chamber is that of a looking-glass. Looking-glasses were probably uncommon in the early days, but what with the variety of textiles on the bed, table, cupboard, and chairs, this room must have been a cheery one with deeply recessed small windows on three sides.

The worthies of New England of about the same time were not behind their contemporaries in the South in their care for this world's goods. John Winthrop of Massachusetts took as his fourth wife Martha Coytemore of Charlestowne, a widow, in October 1647. Before her marriage she made a disposition giving half her estate to her son when



PLATE VIII

An unusual court cupboard, a desk-box on frame, and a stool with turned ornament and appliques—all of the latter part of the seventeenth century

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he should be of age, and retaining the other half for herself, by agreement with her future husband. Since he had disposed of his estate to his children and "had not to endow said Martha," he relinquished all claim to her estate.

A summary of the items kept by Mrs. Cotyemore for herself will suffice. First comes a bedstead with trundle-bed, two pairs of striped curtains, window-curtains, valences, and a green rug. Here we have early record of window curtains with a valence. Of textiles there are quantities of bed and table-linen, a pair of striped-silk curtains and valance, five window-curtains, two window-cloths, a green cloth carpet, a green chimney-cloth, a red-and-green silk quilt, a small Turkey carpet, a suite of red tabie, a tapestry coverlet, and a striped carpet. This is a colorful lot. Then there is a parcel of china plates and saucers—whether actually Chinese porcelain or some white tin-glazed European product such as delft or majolica there is no way of telling. Of metal-work there is considerable—a pair of brass hollow andirons, fire-shovel, tongs, and creepers (small andirons for holding the back log), fifty-four and three quarter ounces of plate, a case of knives, a screw for almonds, a hundred and thirty-

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five pounds of pewter, a parcel of tinware, a smoothing-iron, pestle and mortar, much iron and copper kitchen ware, a clock, and a gun. There was a parcel of books valued at seven pounds, eight shillings, and eightpence.

Altogether this is a very rich inventory. It brings to our notice the use of materials more luxurious than we have associated with the very early days. There is a generous amount of silver and pewter, silk hangings, a Turkey carpet, and china plates. Among the furniture are mentioned twelve leather chairs, a wicker chair, eleven cushions, and a hama-cho (hammock). And these by no means complete the list nor include duplicates.

A few further items taken at random will supplement those already referred to. In the parlor of Mathew Whipple of Ipswich, who died in 1646, there was "one chest furnished with a glass and there were three simpler ones" and he owned a clock valued at one pound. His hall, true to medieval taste, must have resembled an arsenal, for in addition to numerous firearms and swords there was a coslett, or armor for the breast, a pike, a halberd, and a bill. Nine years later (1655) the inventory of Nathaniel Rogers of Ipswich contains many items

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of luxury. In addition to a small cistern in his hall (probably for wine), there were two Spanish platters, a chest, and a hanging cupboard, a round table with five joined stools, six chairs, and five cushions. In the parlor were a great chair, two pictures, a livery cupboard, a clock, window-curtains and rods, a treble viol, and a canopy bed. In one chamber were an exceptionally fine bed with its furniture, a gilt looking-glass, and a rich store of linen. In the chamber over the hall were a yellow rug, a couch, much silver plate, and a watch—a very rare thing. In the study was a library valued at one hundred pounds, which meant a great deal in those days, a cabinet, a desk, two chairs, and a pair of creepers. This inventory is even an advance over the possessions of Dame Winthrop! 174527

From these early inventories we come to realize how definitely the colonists set out to surround themselves with the requisites of comfortable living. Like all Englishmen, in whatever part of the world they find themselves, these colonists strove to recreate some replica of the houses which they had left behind them. Thus, years before 1650 the better class of settlers possessed many things of luxury and beauty. Such people as the Thoroughgoods

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and Winthrops are representative of a large group up and down the seacoast, not the richest members of their communities but "average well-to-do."

How much of these early household goods, besides furniture, was made in the colonies, how much was imported, it is impossible to say. Of course the richer textiles were brought over, as was much of the silver used. An early record of pottery-making occurs in a letter (1636) from Winthrop to his son John in Connecticut, when he comments upon the clay which his son has sent to him. Says he, "The potter saith that [which] you sent formerly is very good."

Color was therefore not lacking in the houses built before 1650. Reds, blues, greens, and yellows were employed in various weaves of silk and wool and in the printed cottons of East Indian provenance which began to be imported regularly into England by the East India Company in 1631. Textures of wood, glass, gilding, fabrics, silver, pewter, brass, copper, and iron, with occasional bits of pottery, lent variety to the interior.

The Virginia and Maryland houses were no whit less pleasant. In 1656 John Hammond tells us that they

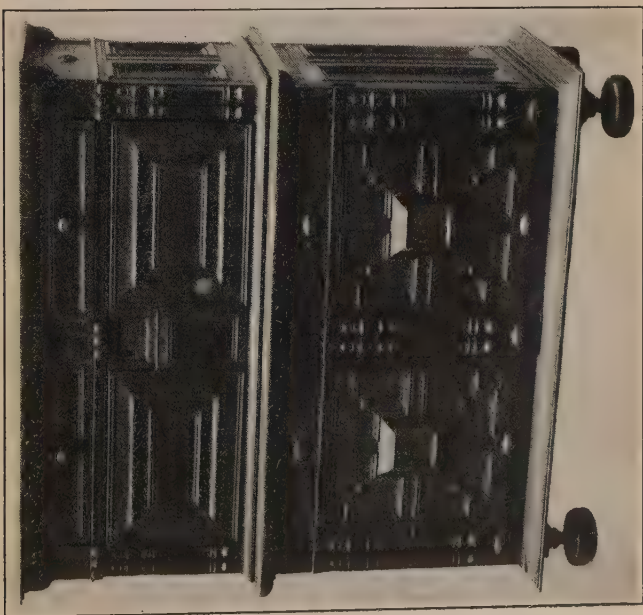
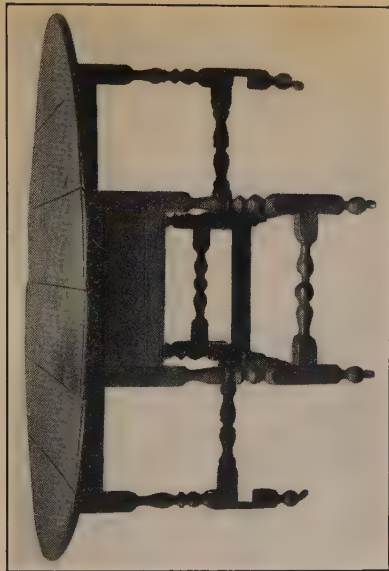


PLATE IX

Rare press cupboard with shaped panels, and a gate-leg table with sliding instead of swinging gates



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yet contrived so delightful that your ordinary houses in England are not so handsome, for usually the rooms are large, daubed [plastered] and white limed, glazed and flowered [possibly meaning floored] and if not glazed windows, shutters which are made very pretty and convenient. . . .

For furniture in 1650 we have "Plankes of walnut-trees for Tables or Cupboards, Cedar and Cypress for Chests, Cabinets and the adorning of magnificent buildings. . . ."

At an earlier date, 1644, a certain Richard Ingle, master and part owner of the ship *Reformation*, was arrested and confined in Maryland for supposed treasonable utterances against the king's majesty. He was slow to forgive this insult and upon his return to England obtained letters of marque permitting him to seize the goods of any who were in hostility to the king. With this weapon of revenge in his hands, he seized a Dutch ship in Maryland waters and went on shore on a plundering expedition. The list of his takings from the homes of some of the rich planters reveals a wealth of luxurious possessions. A few of them may be enumerated, not mentioning very valuable amounts of live stock, grains, and tobacco. A large value was placed on "five great bolles of double gilt" for weaving or em-

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broidery. Seven pieces of silver plate are followed by "one great Diamond, two small chains of gold, two jewells containing in each 8 diamonds, one other jewell with one fair Diamond and Ruby, two braceletts of gold, 4 or 5 Diamond Rings, one ring with a great Saphir, 2 silver chains, other chains, enameled." There was a "ffaire Library of Books" valued at one hundred fifty pounds, and thirty-six guns.

These Marylanders must have been of the more well-to-do type who brought from home their personal jewelry. Their landed possessions and the quantities of slaves, cattle, and provision suggest an almost manorial style of living in 1643.

Enough has been said to show that before the middle of the century, while the great influx of colonists was still going on, a prompt effort was made to establish pleasant homes. Of the possessions which the colonists had, some must have been brought from England; many, and particularly pieces of furniture, were undoubtedly made in the colonies, following, as closely as materials and means allowed, the forms with which the workmen had been familiar at home.

It is this early period which we have called the

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period of Tudor tradition, since the predominating artistic expression followed the line of the late Gothic art of the home country, with its transitional character marking the tentative influence of the Renaissance.

Toward the end of the period, coincident with the restoration of the Stuarts after the downfall of the Puritan commonwealth, the Renaissance influence grows stronger after 1650. Well toward the end of the century, the so-called Jacobean forms tend to lighten and elaborate the more solid and purely structural design of the Gothic tradition.

THE FURNITURE

The furniture of this first period possesses a distinct character of its own. Its forms, developed from European and particularly English prototypes of medieval descent, were adapted to the use of their owners. Since there was no attempt at elaborate living in the colonies during this time, none of the more imposing or pretentious pieces was made. There was always some attempt at decorative effect, but not at consistent elaboration.

Most of the rooms in which this furniture stood

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were not large, and the ceiling was generally low. Hence the larger pieces of furniture were of less frequent occurrence. Particularly popular were those pieces which were space-saving, such as drop-leaf tables which could be folded up and set away in small space; chair-tables which had the same quality as well as a double use; small stools which might be set away under tables; desk-boxes which stood upon chest or cupboard.

To gain a general idea of the furniture, one should consider it from the point of view first of the basic forms from which its designs were evolved; secondly of the construction which preserves the primitive rectangular character inherited from medieval times; lastly, of its decoration which was largely medieval very slightly imbued with Renaissance feeling and simple and primitive in execution. The methods of decoration were the mechanical ones of molding and turning, in addition to which were used carving and painting, all preserving a comparatively primitive quality.

One thing to keep in mind is that all of this furniture was the work of the joiner. The highly finished construction of the cabinet-maker had not appeared. The work is the carrying on of the old

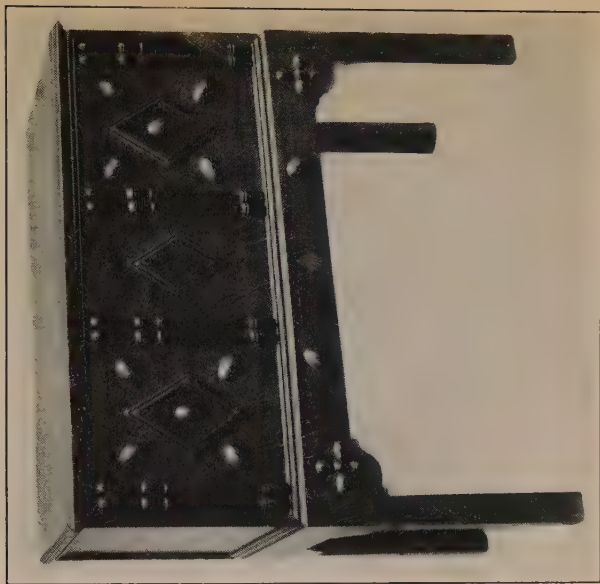
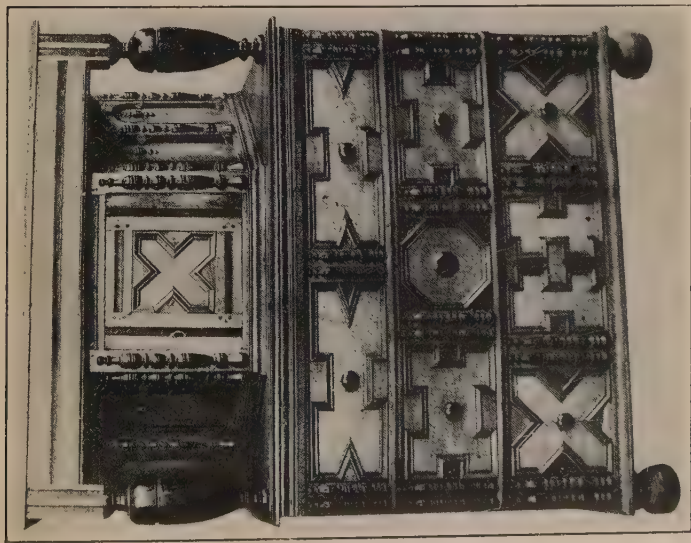


PLATE X

Press cupboard with shaped molded panels and turned appliqués, and a small chest on frame with similar decoration (the frame is a restoration)

The Tudor Tradition

Tudor tradition of the carpenter-joiner but little influenced by foreign finesse.

Within the period, before the transition to a definitely new style, we see a gradual change making its appearance. In the third quarter of the century we note a tendency toward lightening of proportion and a more delicate relation of parts. New designs of turnings make their appearance and the scale of the ornament becomes more refined.

Let us now take up the furniture forms of this first period and consider them first as basic forms for future development and as exponents of the typical contemporary construction, then as utensils which express in their use or decoration the customs and daily life of their time, as well as the tastes and preferences of their owners in decorative and artistic matters.

First in the list of furniture forms is the chest (Plate I). It is of primary importance, not alone because it was the most useful piece of household furniture, serving for storage or as a seat or a table, but also because it presents a large variety of the decorative motifs employed in the period. From it developed, too, a series of forms which take their place in furniture history.

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✓ The English chests brought over here by the early settlers, packed with many of their belongings, were the models on which the American-made chests were constructed. In all of these, the primitive rectangular construction, with stiles and rails, obtains, all structural parts meeting at right angles, neatly mortised and tenoned. The basis of this construction is seen in the medieval chests and wainscoting of England and the Continent.

✓ The customary joining of the period is a survival of the day when movable household furniture had to be so constructed as to be easily knocked down into its elementary parts, packed neatly in coffers, and moved from place to place. The insecurity of life then required that a household should be able to leave its dwelling at very short notice. Even in the case of rich nobles, or the ruler himself, the possessions for household furnishing were few. Elizabeth when she moved from palace to palace, took with her much of the movable furniture which surrounded her.

The fronts of the finer chests are often treated like the English wainscoting with moldings or bevels worked on the stiles and rails which inclose the panels. This is the medieval treatment. The

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earliest chests follow the European prototypes in their subdivisions—three or four panels divided by stiles. This earliest form begins a development of type which runs throughout the succeeding century. In outlining this development it is not suggested that it is a purely American growth. Certain details and treatments are employed principally in American use, but the development of form was well begun in England before the colonies in America were established.

The chest of one compartment with hinged top served the simple purposes of storage. To render the piece of greater use and accessibility, drawers were added below the chest proper, at first one, then two and even three (Plate VII). The piece was thus forced into a taller proportion, while the chest portion with hinged lid was retained. In some chests two short drawers took the place of one long one. In England the addition of one drawer was about as far as this innovation went, so that the occurrence of two or three drawers may be taken as one indication of American origin.

The most directly designed pieces of this sort retain the rectangularly paneled treatment of the chest section, with the drawers expressed below

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in their proper elongated proportion. Others treat the whole drawer section as one, with the drawers somewhat disguised by decoration. Certain of these chests with one or two drawers have been given definite names by which they are known to collectors. There is the so-called Connecticut chest with three rectangular panels and two drawers below, the panels carved with tulip and sunflower, motifs (Fig. 2). The stiles are ornamented with turned spindles applied to them, with bosses and moldings decorating the drawers. This type of chest is supposed to have been made near or at Hartford, Connecticut, toward the end of the seventeenth century. There are variations in the decoration of these chests due to the skill or taste of different joiners.

The Hadley chest (Plate VII), a variation of the Connecticut type, is decorated with the two-plane carving, the ornamental motif being a conventionalized tulip with stem and leaves. The conventionalization is very individual and the design is completed with shallow carved lines on the upper surface (Plate VI).

Extensive use of the tulip in decoration is probably an importation from the Low Countries,

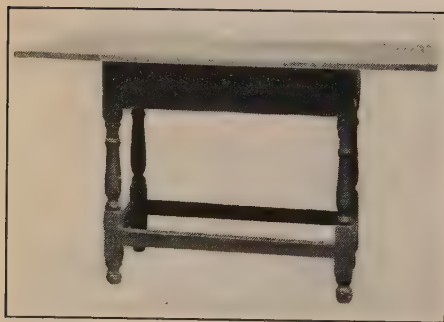


PLATE XI

Chair of last third of seventeenth century, of type upholstered in leather, Turkey-work, or other textile; drop-leaf table; table with drawer; clock on bracket

(Clocks of this type were imported)

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whether by Englishmen who had sojourned there on their way to America or whether coming directly to America from England it is hard to say.

With the heightening of the piece, the top served for the display of small objects of metal or pottery and the hinged top constituted an impractical detail. Drawers were therefore continued up to the very top of the framework and we have the chest of drawers as we know it to-day (Plate XIII). The drawers of these chests and chests of drawers rest not on the bottom of the sides, but on runners which fit into grooves cut into the side of the drawer half-way up from the bottom edge.

The next step in the development of the chest form takes place at the very end of the period, virtually at its close. This consists of the raising of the chest of drawers upon a supporting framework of legs and stretchers, and the earliest form of high-boy is the result (Plate XVI). Its elaboration we shall follow in succeeding periods.

There is a variety of arrangement in all the types ranging between the low chest and the high chest of drawers. With the idea once established, each joiner could work out his own ideas or the ideas of the purchaser, to suit special places or

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special requirements. The variation, however, is not so great in the matter of form and the disposition of the various parts as it is in the use of decoration.

The decoration of chests and other pieces is even more characteristic of this period than are their form and rectangular construction. There are first of all certain mechanical methods of ornamenting. The first of these is molding. The moldings—and their profiles are essentially of the period—are run on a board with a hand-plane whose knife is cut to the desired shape. The moldings are of two sorts, those run on the flat surface of stile and rail, and those which are run on the edges of stile and rail enframing panels. These latter moldings do not miter at the corner but end, on the stile, by abutting the rail, while on the rail (or horizontal board) they die off in the surface. The lower rail is seldom molded, only beveled. In the simpler chests a bevel takes the place of the edge molding on both stile and rail.

As the century progresses, another type and use of molding comes in. This is a narrow one, separately cut and applied as a finish around a panel. Its use is coincident with the Jacobean influence

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and comes in the late seventeenth century in America. Combined with it are panels of various shapes, brackets, applied turned spindles, and bosses of round, oval, square or diamond shape (Plate X). The popularity of this stylistic ornament came into England by way of the Low Countries. Plates of

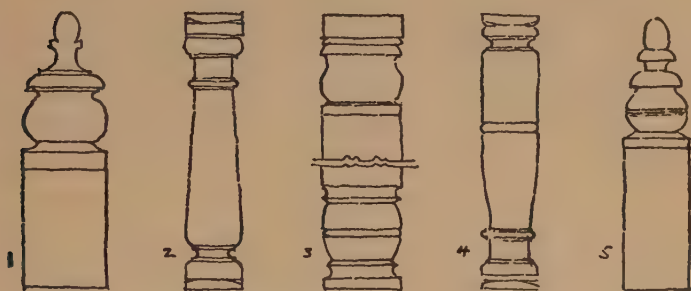


FIGURE 1—Some typical turnings of the earlier part of the seventeenth century

design such as those of Vredeman de Vries and others gave the cue to English joiners, and a simplified version of their elaborate furniture was made in America. The appliqué ornaments were turned or cut from maple or similarly fine-grained woods. The moldings here, as well as the applied ornament, were usually painted black, simulating ebony.

Turning is an ancient mechanical method much employed at this time. Technically it is cutting

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done with a knife upon wood which is rapidly revolved in a lathe about an axis. As the wood revolves, the turner, skilled in his craft, moves his knife to cut deeply here, more shallowly there, producing a profile which is symmetrical all around the axis.

This method was used on legs of tables, chairs, stools, and any furniture where the supporting framework was to be lightened or ornamented. It was also used in another way: two pieces of wood clamped together were turned as one piece, then separated, giving ornaments of semicircular sections whose flat side was applied to a plain surface. This turned appliqué ornament is characteristic of the late seventeenth century in America, although its original use in England dates from the reigns of Elizabeth and James I.

So much for the mechanical ornamentation, which changes from the earlier Gothic treatment to that of the Jacobean renaissance during this first period. The rectangular construction of the medieval Tudor remains, this change in ornament being the first sign of an evolution of style.

The Jacobean to which we refer is the style associated with the reign of James I, although in

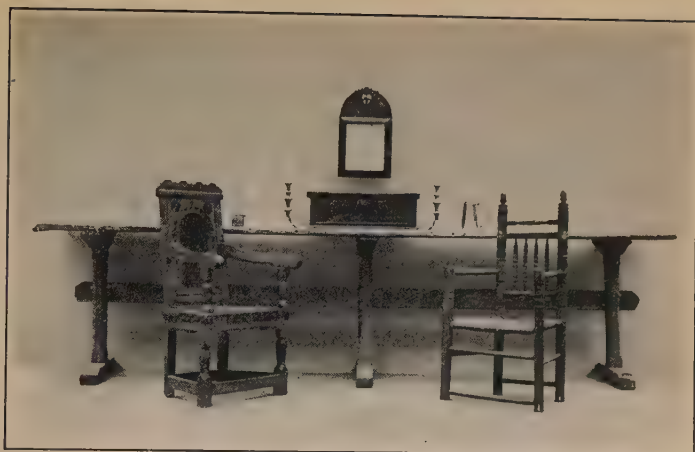


PLATE XII

Groups showing relation in line, scale, and ornament between the different pieces of early furniture

(The chair in lower left-hand corner is a provincial piece of the eighteenth century, carrying on the older style)

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America its use is contemporary with the reign of James II. This is somewhat confusing to amateurs.

Perhaps the most intrinsically important ornamentation was the carving, and again we must refer to the English prototype. It is likely that some of the very earliest chests are those which approach most closely to the English technique, with low-relief carving, crude in execution but with some attempt at a softening gradation between the background and the projecting design (Plate IV). The relief is very slight, however, and no doubt was meant to be picked out in color. The subject-matter of the early carved decoration was partly architectural, such as arches, trefoils and lunettes. Interlacing ornament, acanthus leaves and the guilloche were drawn from architectural ornament. Many of the designs are based on geometrical forms.

Another technique of carving, and one more typical of colonial use, shows only two parallel surfaces, a design with a sunken background. The sinkage is rather slight and the effect was largely dependent upon the use of color, red and black. The decoration on the tulip and sunflower chests, already mentioned, is of this type, as is that on the so-called Hadley chests. All of these types of dec-

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orative carving may be more closely understood from the illustrations than from description.

A detail different from all of these, but sometimes found, is a sort of beveled treatment surrounding a panel outside its molding, which raised the panel above the rest of the front. (Plate IX). This was



FIGURE 2—Tulip and sunflower panels found on Connecticut chests

no doubt inherited directly from the Low Countries, where its use was very popular. It occurs chiefly on drawer-fronts, occasionally on chest panels.

The last important method of decoration is painting. The earliest painting followed medieval precedent, bright color flatly applied to background or raised surface to enhance the effect of the design. The colors were black, white and gray, red and yellow. Black and red were most popular and were used on turnings or moldings to give contrast.

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In the latter part of the century, panels of chests or of drawer-fronts were treated with a scroll or floriate design in red, white, and yellow on a black background. It is difficult to date many of these painted pieces except by the character of the designs. Most of them would date from the last third or last quarter of the century.

A cruder sort of coloring called "spoon mottling" simulates to some extent a marbled effect. It is done in gray, white, and black or in tones of red. This is found on some furniture of early form where it would seem to be the original treatment.

If, as we have seen, the construction preserved the traditions of a preceding period, it is the decoration which gives to it its peculiar quality of the day in which it was made. The construction was rectangular and based on medieval usage. The earlier use of moldings cut on stiles and rails, and the bevel which often edged the bottom rail of a panel otherwise surrounded by molding are also Gothic survivals. But virtually all the other carved, turned, or molded decoration shows the effect of Renaissance influence. There is not a single example of the Gothic use of continuous moldings following interlacing curves or growing one

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out of the other to form tracery patterns. The carving employs either architectural detail or floral and formal detail used in the architectural sense. Just as in architecture, the change in furniture character began with the ornamental detail and gradually the new ideas affected the structure.

In the study of chests there are to be noted a few points of difference in materials, between the English and the American. First of all, the American white oak which is generally used preserves a lighter color than the English. The latter turns a very dark brown with age, and except for American pieces which have been badly exposed to the weather or artificially treated with color, the tone of the American oak is several shades lighter than the English. Also, a great deal of quartered oak was used in the colonies, while most of the English oak of the same period is cut with a straight grain.

In the construction a second important point to note is the presence of pine. It is very frequently found that the bottom, the lids, and the backs of chests are of American pine, while in the drawers the backs and bottoms will be of this softer wood. The sides, in which the grooves are cut for the runners, will be of oak to resist wear.

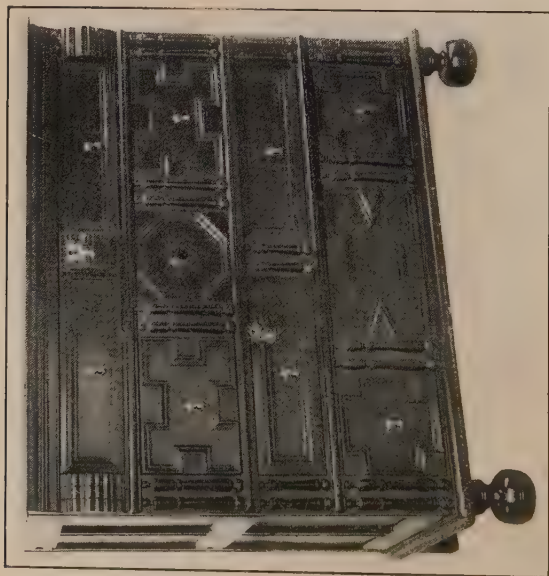


PLATE XIII

Two chests of drawers of the late seventeenth century, with variously shaped panels and turned appliqués

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This combination of pine with oak, in places where less wear is expected, gives one a start in ascribing a chest, cupboard, or other piece of furniture to an American colonial origin.

In conjunction with the illustrations it will be seen how large a variety of form and decoration was possible in chests alone. Virtually every room of the early houses had at least one chest. Tallow to keep out the moths was laid on a little shelf at one end inside and the finer textiles of the household were stored in the chest when not in use. A survival of an early day, found toward the end of the century, was the marking of chests, sometimes, with the initials of the owner, a custom deriving at least as far back as the medieval Italian. The chest, so much the pride of the housewife, was a fit subject for enhancement by ornament, and worthy of a prominent position in every room. When it was covered with a "carpet" of rich or gaily colored materials its decorative quality was undeniable.

Related in a way to chests were the desk-boxes. Their usefulness was great, if occasional, for they contained papers and writing-materials, sometimes particularly valuable books. Their construction was simple, four boards dovetailed at the corners, a flat

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bottom, and a hinged top. The sides and front were usually of oak, the top and bottom frequently of pine. The top, edged with a thumb-nail molding, projected beyond the front and sides, and narrow cleats kept it from warping.

These little boxes are often almost exquisite in their decoration, which occurs usually on the front, rarely on the sides. The fact that the tops are not decorated would suggest that they were ordinarily kept in a rather high place, perhaps on a court cupboard where the top was not seen, or that the top was left plain for writing. The decorative motifs repeat those of the chests, reduced and refined versions of typical seventeenth-century ornament. Carving is the usual form of ornamentation. Some boxes of the latter part of the century have the appliqué ebonized decoration, some few even are paneled in decoratively shaped panels. The so-called Friesland carving occurs more frequently on the desk-boxes than on the chests. It is a fine-scale ornament, cut very shallowly and following patterns of a geometrical sort. A notch or gouge-carving with no gradation, it is simply an incised design in a flat surface, and holds much in common with the peasant carving of northern Europe.

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Painted decoration, too, was used on desk-boxes, colors and designs very similar to those of the chests forming the basis.

Just as in the chests, so from the desk-boxes of the seventeenth century we may follow a development of form which leads us through the next century. The desk-box was for greater convenience raised upon a supporting framework of legs and stretchers, and below the box portion with its hinged lid a drawer was inserted. Some of the desk-boxes were designed with slanting tops. With one of these raised on legs, and a drawer inserted below, the idea of the slant-top desk was born. The development of the desk follows through the succeeding century.

The most pretentious piece of seventeenth-century American furniture, and one primarily characteristic of this century, is the cupboard. The cupboard form is one of medieval popularity, harking back to the Gothic credence for its arrangement. The Continental prototype was magnificently carved at times, and its English cousin of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was elaborate in decoration.

The cupboards made in America were commonly of two types, the court cupboard and the press cup-

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board. The design of the cupboard is based upon the arrangement of two separate carcasses, one above the other. The court cupboard has the upper section inclosed to form compartments for storage, while its lower section is usually open and has a shelf a short distance above the floor. The press cupboard resembles the court cupboard in its upper section, but its lower section is closed and fitted either with drawers or with compartments with doors. A type of court cupboard, usual in England but so far unknown in America, had no closed section but was made up of open shelves. These were handsomely carved and used for the display of elaborate plate, a necessity which did not exist at this early date in America. Hence, the cupboard in the colonies was primarily a piece for storage, with space on its top for the display of such handsome possessions as the owner wished to show—silver, ceramics, or pewter.

There is much variety in the design of the cupboard, no two being exactly alike. For the upper portion there are two general dispositions. First, that with a straight front with two doors flanking a central panel; secondly, that with a central door flanked by splayed sides. In both cases the top is



PLATE XIV

A room belonging to the Essex Institute, furnished as of the late seventeenth century

The Tudor Tradition

supported upon colonettes or posts at the corners. Both treatments of the upper section occur in court and press cupboards.

The lower section of the press cupboard is variously treated with doors closing the whole front; with one central door flanked by fixed panels; with one central panel flanked by two doors; and lastly the lower section is sometimes filled entirely with drawers. In one unique piece there are doors which open in both top and bottom sections, displaying drawers instead of compartments within (Plate IX).

Another form which probably in America served the same use as the court cupboard was the livery cupboard. It is difficult to say what if any difference existed between the two as they were used in this country. All types of cupboards served for storage of foods, clothing, utensils, and the like, while the "hanging cupboard" mentioned in inventories probably meant some sort of wardrobe for hanging clothes. At the same time, they formed the most important decorative feature in a room. Every cupboard had its cloth or cover of bright-hued material, and on it would be grouped the finest utensils of metal, ceramics, or glass. In the small and low-ceiled rooms of the time the importance of this

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tallest piece of furniture with its decorative display was great.

The construction of the cupboards is true to seventeenth-century type. The ends are usually paneled with molded stiles and rails in Gothic fashion. The frieze below the top board is decorated and rests on the corner posts of the upper section, while the corner stiles of the lower section continue through to form legs. In the court cupboard the shelf of the bottom is treated with molded skirting.

All the ornamental treatments of the period are found on the cupboards, which are the most elaborate pieces of the time. Carving of all sorts, moldings, turned posts, ebonized appliqués, brackets, drops, carved or billeted moldings, decorative panel shapes and painting are all met with. For material, they employ the same combinations of woods as do the chests.

From this important seventeenth-century form there was no development in succeeding periods. Its importance was perhaps inherited by the much later sideboard, and its use, by the built-in cupboards of the eighteenth century. But its form belongs entirely to the seventeenth century and the centuries before.

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The next important furniture form of the early period was the chair. This falls into three groups, to which there are some exceptions. The chair which follows most closely the constructive methods and decorative treatment of an essentially seventeenth-century sort, is the wainscot chair, which descends from a long line of medieval ancestors. Another type of equally ancient lineage is the chair made up of turned posts and spindles. A third type is the slat-back chair in which horizontal solid slats are set between turned uprights to form the back. Partaking of some elements of all of these types is the triangular chair which, of ancient form, is very occasionally found in America—usually imported.

The wainscot chair is the essentially fine chair of the period. It is joined in the rectangular method of vertical posts and strengthened by heavy stretchers. The front posts, which support the arm, are decorated usually by turning, and in most examples the design of this turning is excellent. The back posts are plain and into them is fitted a solidly paneled back. The top rail is either straight or cut out to some decorative silhouette, and usually extends over the back posts, which are tenoned into it. The back panel recalls the treatment of some

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chest and cupboard panels. The stiles and rails may be carved or molded. The arms are of a solid piece of wood cut to a curve for comfort.

These chairs, descendent from the high-backed chairs of church use and finding their immediate prototype in the masters' chairs of the great halls of England, are rare. Up until the seventeenth century a certain formality pertained to the use of such chairs as these, which were, in the great houses of England, reserved for the use of the master of the house and for his distinguished guests. The humbler folk who were the earlier settlers in America brought with them some of this inherited feeling, and the chairs which were evolved here in greater numbers were the simpler open chairs of the turned and slat-back variety.

The turned chair, while lacking some of the distinction of the wainscot chair, was none the less a handsome piece, particularly when fitted with its rich cushion of velvet or damask. Two general types have come to particular notice and been given the names of two colonial governors, by which they are known. The simpler is the so-called Carver chair. In this the front and back posts are turned, the latter with somewhat elaborately profiled finials,

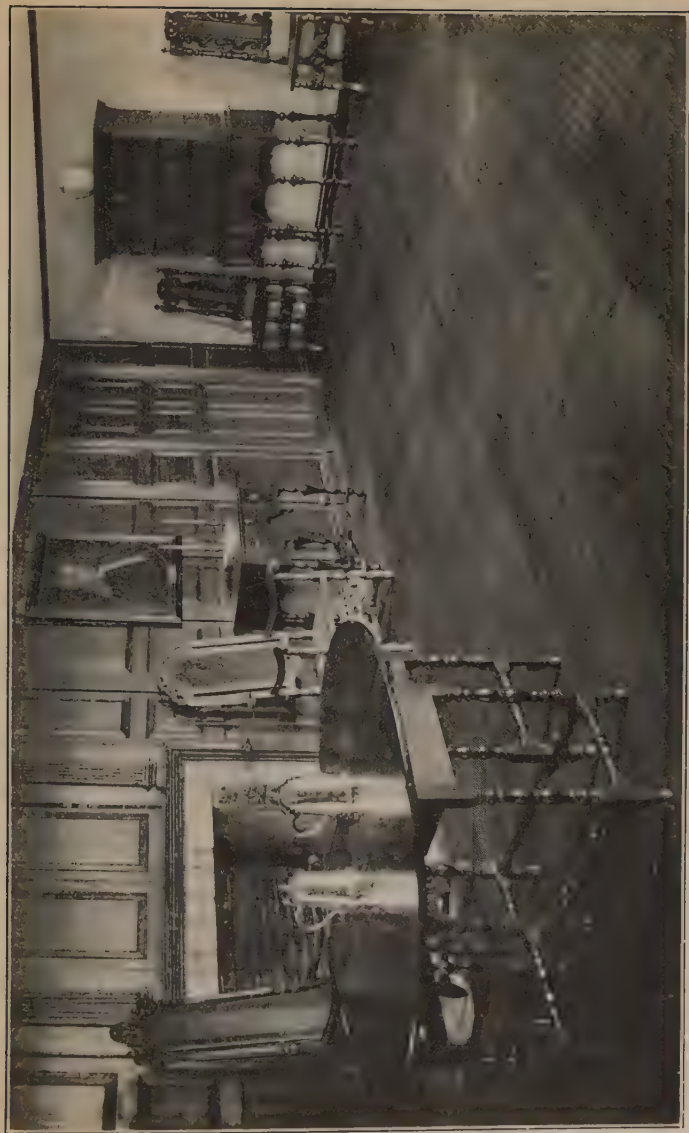


PLATE XV

Furniture of the transitional type, shown in a room with paneling half a century later in date than the furniture

The Tudor Tradition

the former ending at the top in a rounded knob. Plain or simply turned stretchers strengthen the under-structure, while turned spindles set horizontally form the strengthening of the back. The distinguishing feature of the Carver chair is the presence of an upper, somewhat delicately turned piece set between the back posts, and slightly below it a less decorated horizontal piece into which are fitted vertical spindles. A third horizontal spindle just above the seat-line receives these vertical spindles, although in a few cases they fit into the piece which forms the back seat-rail.

The arms are made up of one turned bar set between the front and back posts. These chairs are usually splint- or rush-seated. They vary in the quality of their turning and in the relation of their parts.

Unlike the wainscot chairs, many Carver side chairs are found. By reason of their simplicity of construction, their comparative lightness, and their charm of design, these chairs were very popular, and their use carries well through the century. The earlier ones are constructed of heavier members than the later, while the finer turnings of the early work render it of greater artistic interest.

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A second variation of the turned-spindle type is the so-called Brewster chair. Here the principle of construction is the same as that of the Carver but is elaborated. The back is divided into two ranks of turned vertical spindles, one above the other, the lower fitted into the back seat-rail. Vertical spindles are set between the arm-rail and the seat-rail. Below the seat-rail more spindles are set, between it and the rungs which strengthen the under-structure, sometimes two and sometimes one rank of vertical spindles surrounding the lower part of the piece.

This over-use of the small vertical spindles does not particularly strengthen the structure and must have followed a desire to elaborate the simple Carver type. The seats are sometimes splint, sometimes a wooden panel fitted between the seat-rails. The turned spindle chair did not continue in very recognizable form after the first period, but from it were developed new types which, with the banister-back of transitional form as a link, led to other eighteenth-century types of note.

The third main type of chair is the slat-back. Here the back and front posts, the rungs, and the arms are turned comparatively simply, the finials of the back offering the chief decorative features. Be-

The Tudor Tradition

tween the back posts are set horizontal, curved slats worked out to a thin edge. In the earlier variety of the slat-back chair the broad slats are most usual. There are generally three slats, sometimes four. The top line of the slat is straight, with an approximate quarter-circle cut from the ends where it joins the back post. The width varies slightly from top to bottom.

The slat-back chair was one of the most popular of the early types and one of the longest-lived. As the century progressed, the structural members were lightened, as were the turnings which took on the characteristic designs of their time and the back posts were turned between the slats and marked with scorings. All through the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth the slat-back persisted, but, like many a survival of an older day, it became the provincial or country thing.

These three general types of chair, therefore, include most of the chairs of the early period, with the addition of the three-corner chair. Varied in relation of parts and lightened in proportion, they continued well through the century, giving opportunity to the individual chair-maker to express his ideas of beauty and usefulness.

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In the third quarter of the seventeenth century another chair appears which recalls the Continental and particularly the Italianate Dutch taste of the late sixteenth century. This new type was essentially more sophisticated than the other three. It was upholstered in leather or textiles and the scale of its turnings showed an unusual refinement. Its

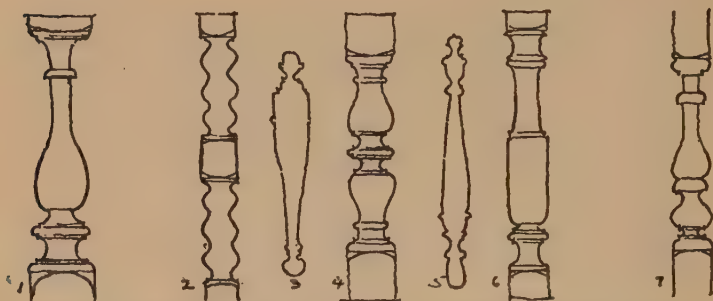


FIGURE 3—Some typical turnings of the late seventeenth century, including two small appliqués (Nos. 3 and 5)

legs and stretches were sausage- or spool-turned, with little variation to speak of. The seat was rather high from the floor. The upholstered back formed a rectangle, with a space between it and the line of the seat. A further decorative touch came from the use of large brass-headed tacks around seat and back.

Two fine examples of this chair-type exist, cov-

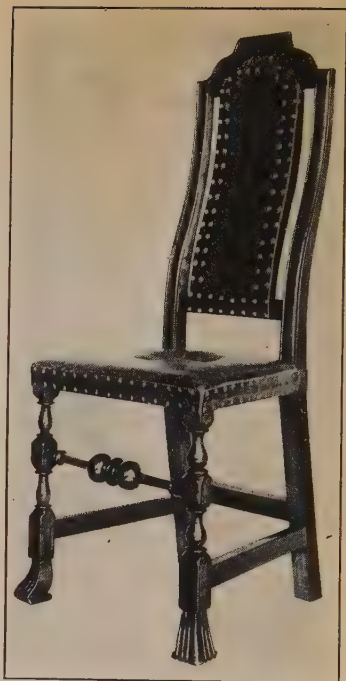
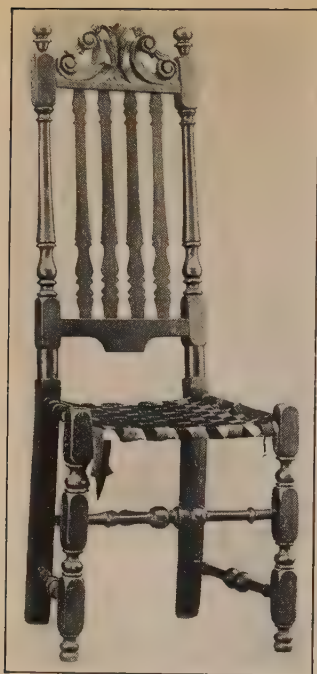


PLATE XVI

(Above) Banister-back chair and transitional chair with Spanish feet; (below) banister-back arm-chair, caned side chair, high chest, and desk, all of transitional period of early eighteenth century

The Tudor Tradition

ered with the original Turkey-work, an imitation in wool of the Oriental crafts of the seventeenth century, in which the wool is knotted with the so-called Giordes knot. These chairs are often turned from maple, rather than oak, and presage a greater refinement in furniture-making.

For seating purposes, in addition to chairs and the tops of chests, the chief pieces were the stool and the form. The stool was short and rectangular, the form was simply a bench or an elongated edition of the stool. These were used for seating at table, the head of the house alone occupying a chair, true to ancient English precedent.

Stools of the early type are found with the typical early turning, the skirting molded and the slightly overhanging top edged with thumb-nail molding. The legs are generally, although not always, canted for greater stability and strengthened by stretches on all four sides. The under-structure of the early stools is of oak, the seat usually of pine.

Stools continued to be made throughout the century, their numbers and turnings being lightened in conformity with the gradual change in style. Their pads of colored upholstery gave the stools

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used in the better houses a share in the decorative effect.

Tables are the last important form of furniture of the first period. They fall into three main groups. First, and most primitive in form, is the trestle table. Second is the rectangular table with legs at the corners. Third comes the drop-leaf table of various sorts.

The trestle table originated with the idea of making a large table to seat many persons yet at the same time one which could be easily removed and stored in small space. Its parts were few—a board top resting upon H-shaped trestles, which after being set in place could be braced by a stretcher pegged or wedged into place. From very early days in Europe this trestle table found a place, and its use, so much a part of English custom, was brought to this country. The largest and perhaps the oldest table of this sort, of American origin, is in the Bolles Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City. This is of the simplest form, with a long narrow board resting upon the trestle jointed by a stretcher. The top is pine, the trestles oak with no attempt at decoration excepting the chamfering of the corners of the up-

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rights. The table is unusually large and could hardly have been for use in a house.

Later types of trestle tables, more commonly found, are smaller, and the top is affixed. The shorter tables have seldom more than two trestles with a stretcher between, and for decoration turned balusters set on top of the stretcher. Turning forms the chief method of decoration for all of these tables, and the idea is applied to very small as well as medium-large tables with tops round, oval, or rectangular. Most of the best existing examples date well along in the latter part of the period, the earliest ones probably being crude things made to serve purely practical purposes and destroyed when replaced by finer work.

The rectangular table with four turned legs is more commonly found, and examples may be seen dating from the mid-seventeenth century and later. In the earlier examples many of the characteristic turnings and moldings of the early type are found with rectangular joining similar to that of chests, cupboards, and stools.

The tops of these tables, usually of pine or some soft wood, have considerable overhang. The skirting below is comparatively shallow and run with

Early American Furniture

a typical molding. This skirting mortices into the square legs at the corners. The legs are turned in vase or baluster designs of the period of James I, between the square sections into which join the skirting and the stretchers. The stretchers occur on all four sides, plain or molded on their upper side.

In some cases the bottom line of the skirting is cut to a design of curves, or it may have openwork brackets at the corners and turned drops in the center. Color was used to accentuate the lines of the shallow parts of turning and the moldings.

Another type of these rectangular tables is the so-called tavern table. Here the skirting or apron is deepened and drawers are often fitted into it. The four turned legs are braced by stretchers and the top overhangs. The turnings of most of the tables of this sort would suggest a date comparatively late in the period.

Also from late in the period, date the tables of not large size whose turned legs are joined by rungs across the ends and a stretcher between these rungs running lengthwise of the table. Drawers are often fitted into the apron. These are of the type which was made in England during the Commonwealth.

Drop-leaf tables of many sorts were most pop-

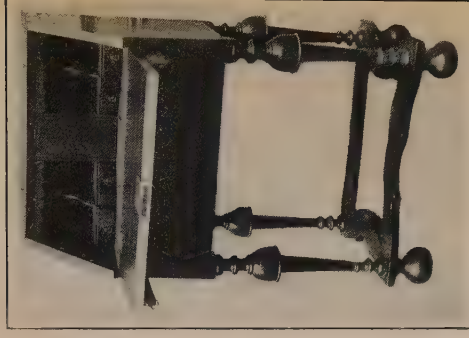
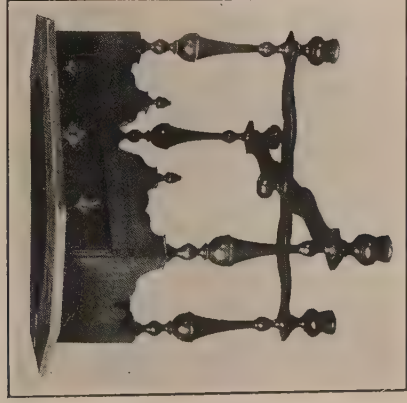


PLATE XVII

Slate-top table, high-boy, and desk,—all of transitional period,—with turned legs and shaped stretchers, the high-boy ornamented with veneers and inlay

(The slate top with marquetry frame was imported and mounted on American-made base)

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ular, by reason of their space-saving qualities. There are various combinations in their understructure. Some, called gate-legged, have a rectangular plan with four legs and stretchers, and added to this on the long side hinged gates which swing out to support the drop leaf when it is raised. The larger tables have two gates at each side. The trestle gate-leg table employs, for its central portion, trestles at the ends instead of legs.

Another simple type has no gate, but a hinged flap or bracket which swings out from under the top to support the drop-leaf.

Drop-leaf tables occur in large numbers throughout the last third of the seventeenth century. Their turnings are the chief guide to their period, which would seldom seem to go back to the earliest forms used in America but would date from a time subsequent to the Stuart Restoration in England.

It is difficult to describe slight variations in detail of ornament and construction, and the reader is referred to the illustrations for typical and characteristic forms of turning, molding, and carving. The close dating of furniture is scarcely possible at this early time. One judges the date, first of all, from the general form and proportion,

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and the relation of parts. These, taken in conjunction with the material and the presence of detail whose relative date is known, may lead one to a comparatively accurate dating. It is important to know the early from the late turnings, the early from the late moldings, and those motifs of carved decoration which preserve more of an early traditional character than the eclectic suggestion of Renaissance form. The forms of the furniture and their methods of joining are survivals of the medieval, while the decoration shows the use of Renaissance motifs, albeit illy understood, which are tentatively executed. The placing of this ornament follows more frequently the medieval habit. Thus in construction, form, and use of ornament the medieval tradition was slow to change, the Renaissance and perverted classic forms showing themselves but slightly in the ornamental motifs.





CHAPTER III

THE STYLISTIC EVOLUTION

THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

TOWARD the very end of the seventeenth century there came a change in the temper of the western world, the effects of which in America were noticeable, if somewhat different, from those in Europe. Then began a period of rapid change in all departments of life which in a comparatively short space of years transformed the medieval world into the modern.

These years in the American colonies were stirring ones, filled with contrast and keyed high with excitement. Such a time was bound to come, but its essential quality derives largely from events across the seas which form the background of the development of colonial life in America.

The change in the world's temper extended throughout Europe in greater or less degree. It was the result and culmination of activities of cen-

Early American Furniture

turies before, and in particular is the aftermath, the inevitable outcome, of the age of exploration and discovery.

The rapid widening of the horizon of the known world had opened up countless channels of trade with foreign lands during that energetic age, when ships of all the nations were sailing the seas seeking new routes to the Orient, rich mines of precious metals, and hoards of jewels. The traffic between East and West, which had been reduced for a time by the closing of the ancient trade routes, was now carried on by sea in greater volume than ever before. It had taken many years for this to come about, but by the end of the seventeenth century far-reaching trade relations were regularly established, and the commerical interchange among the nations of Europe themselves had drawn them together economically at least.

The widened outlook which came from the complete development of the many contacts of the age of discovery was associated closely with a broader intellectual interest resulting from the scholastic investigations of the Renaissance. The evidence of these two contributing influences is seen in a change from the retrospective and introspective



PLATE XVIII

Furniture showing the introduction of structural curves—a typical group of the period just before the full rococo influence is seen

The Stylistic Evolution

states of mind of the medieval peoples to a forward-looking and realistic point of view toward the world at large.

The particular result of the physical changes in world affairs—the expansion of commerce and trade—was an economic prosperity encouraged, particularly in England, by a feeling of political and social stability, the lull after the storm of the preceding parlous times. The change in mental state produced in its turn a change in social structure and in political organization. All of these radical and vital changes in many departments of human affairs—spiritual, mental, political, economic, and social—registered emphatically in the development of the artistic tradition which was associated with the nations of the western world. In America, as in England and France, artistic expression was responding to the changed conception of the art of living.

Both in England and in France, between the years 1680 and 1730 or 1735 new ways and customs of living developed. In England the Puritan revolution, the supremacy for a time of the Commonwealth of Cromwell, brought the middle classes into a new feeling of self-consciousness. With

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the restoration of the Stuarts, a natural though temporary revulsion took place against the dull restraint of Puritan belief and middle-class stolidity and led to an era of wild extravagance. Again, as nature took its course, through the reigns of William and Mary, Queen Anne, and George I, the nation settled down to its more normal character. These years saw English life repairing the devastations of a centripetal breaking up of its social groups by a centrifugal consolidation of its people.

In France the formal splendor of the court of Louis XIV, *le Roi Soleil*, quickly gave way at his death in 1715 to a desire for life on a more human scale. During the regency before the accession of Louis XV, the social change showed itself in a lesser formality of intercourse in aristocratic circles than had been permitted by the old king. This informality resulted largely in an extravagant debauchery which set in motion the wheels of a revolution destined to grind so thoroughly later in the century. At the same time, its influence upon the utilitarian arts was of vital importance.

While these developments were taking place in England and in France—France is important to us since her influence at this time was very great

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in England—the colonies in America were undergoing equally important changes. By this time the first generation of settlers had passed to their fathers, and the second and third generations, born here, held different feelings with regard to their own land and the mother country. The sterner elements of the Puritan code were yielding before increasing prosperity. A complete and ordered social life accompanied the regular establishment of trade and commercial exercise. New England and the middle States found themselves chiefly concentrating upon trade—coastwise and transatlantic—manufacture, ship-building, and the production of staple materials. Agriculture on a large scale was neglected except for local consumption. The seaports of New York, Philadelphia, Newport, and Boston grew into commercial and shipping centers with their traffic in rum, molasses, sugar, and slaves. The Newport of that time has been called the great slave emporium of the western continent.

In the South, manufacture was neglected in favor of agriculture. The great plantations of Virginia were almost as self-sufficient as medieval baronies. Quantities of tobacco from Virginia and

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of rice from South Carolina were sent to England, and there sold or bartered, the ships returning with the luxuries and necessities for the aristocratic planters.

There thus developed during the period groups of rich and poor, and a distinct aristocracy of wealth. The contact with England as well as with the Continent carried to America the new ideas and new luxuries which were rapidly taking essential places in European life, often within a year after their appearance in London. The Navigation Laws of England brought it about that most of the direct trade of the colonies was with her, and in ships of English or colonial ownership, manned chiefly by English crews. The contact with England was perhaps more direct and continuous in the South, where virtually all the export went abroad. In the North much of the shipping was coastwise or with the West Indies and Barbados.

It is therefore impossible to consider this period in the growth of the utilitarian arts in America without taking into consideration with them the England of the time.

There are two aspects of the period which should engage our attention: first the change in point of

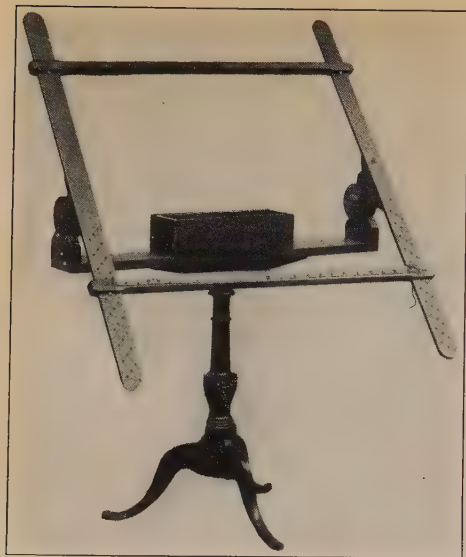


PLATE XIX

Couch with cabriole legs; embroidery frame, and japanned wall-clock—the last by Claggett of Newport

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view of the people themselves toward the affairs of daily life, and secondly the expression in the arts of this change and of the innovations from foreign sources which were having their effect.

Intellectually the Puritan revolution, with the years of turmoil leading up to it, had created a certain cold, almost cynical attitude toward men and affairs on the part of all people high and low. Enthusiasm for high aims and noble sentiments gave place to a rule of reason and common sense. People looked to their comforts and luxuries at home and to the protection of their own interests in the outside world. This attitude, particularly marked in the literature of the period, is reflected in governmental affairs. Before the Puritan revolution and with the first years of the Restoration, there was a survival of the old ruling by the king, a modicum of the Divine Right mingled with a tradition of king-worship. By the end of the period which we are now considering the government had become an official rather than a personal thing, composed of departments organized to care for the nation's affairs and headed by secretaries who were virtually responsible to Parliament. This was a radical change in a very short time.

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In economic conditions an equally important development was going on. The British merchant marine was carrying on the traditions of the Elizabethan sea-dogs and bringing home luxuries from all parts of the globe. Settled conditions produced a prosperity which created a market for all imports. From both commercial and artistic points of view, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685, led throughout the period to an enormous increase in manufacture and in craftsmanship. The Edict of Nantes, giving freedom of religious belief and practice to the Protestants of France, was revoked by Louis XIV. As a result, there was a general exodus of thousands of the Huguenots to Flanders and England in search of religious freedom. Many of these Huguenots were craftsmen, artisans, and weavers, and thus through them the accumulated store of artistic training built up under Louis XIV was distributed over Europe. Further to whet the appetite of the buying public, the European wars of the time gave opportunity for seizure of enemy ships laden with foreign goods. These were distributed and new tastes developed from the acquisition of exotic commodities.

The introduction of many of these foreign tastes

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led to the development of social customs which in their turn showed in the artistic expression of the utilitarian arts. Tea- and chocolate-drinking came into England, at first as the fashion with the élite, but was soon taken up by the middle classes, which followed their lead. Coffee-drinking was never in higher esteem, while the use of tobacco, both for smoking and for snuff, explains much of the wealth of the Virginias. All of these habitual customs were symptomatic of what we have called the centripetal spirit of the time, the getting together of congenial groups discussing in pleasant mood all the events of the day. They created not only such utterly important social centers as the coffee-house—that great eighteenth-century institution—but in the homes of the nation brought forth furniture and utensils for the serving and taking of the social beverages, of which we shall hear more anon, or for the practice of games of chance. Suggestions of new ways of cooking, introduced from the East, caused to be made new utensils in metal and ceramic wares which gave opportunity to the craftsmen to express their ideas of the beautiful.

The sojourn abroad of many of the aristocracy had widened their insular sense of what was fitting

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in the homes of the great. Elaboration of service and luxury of furnishing came to a high degree of development, strikingly advanced beyond the ways of Elizabeth's day. In artistic affairs this sojourn of the British aristocracy on the Continent resulted in two immensely important activities—the development of the collections of art and the interest in the promotion of contemporary art endeavor.

Charles II set the rage for collecting, and the royal collection formed by him—paintings and *objets d'art*—was one of the greatest in the world. This fashionable custom was carried forward by the acquisitive Dutch taste of William of Orange and his consort, and further by that of Anne. By this time, of course, the collecting craze had permeated the nation and it continued on through the century.

For the development of local art and craft endeavor, the patronage, on a wide scale, of the native artists and craftsmen began in the modern sense in the reign of Charles II. From this time on, and particularly after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the workers in the arts received a liberal patronage from the rich and the great; for these

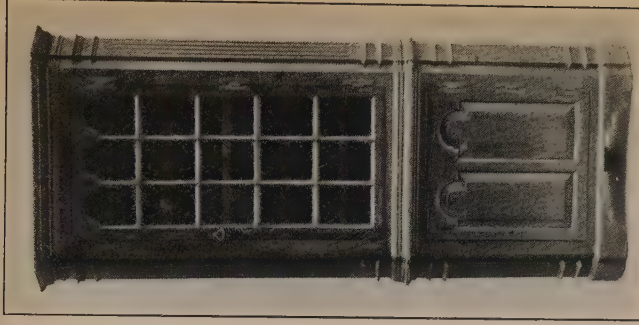
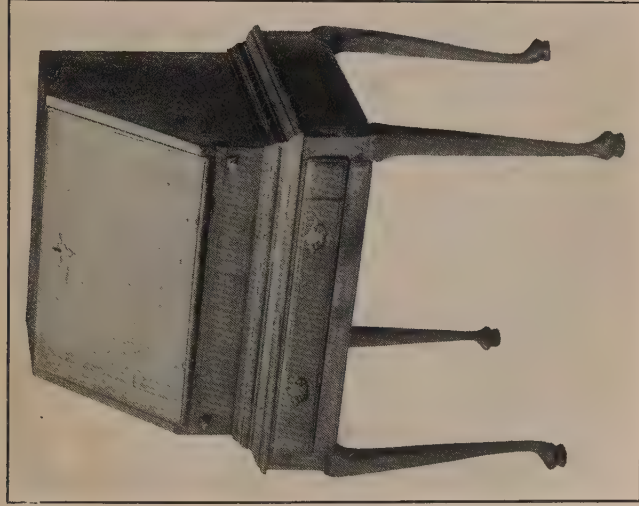
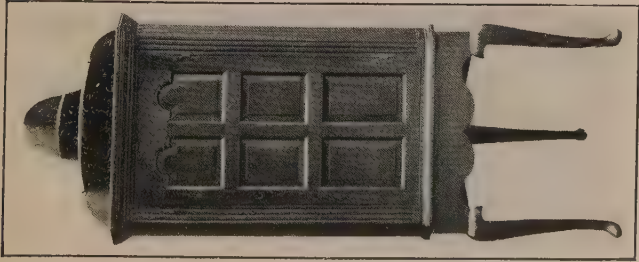


PLATE XX

Desk with detached box on stand with cabriole legs, and corner cupboards of early Georgian types
in walnut

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two were not synonymous, a bourgeois aristocracy of wealth having developed a position of power and influence.

The Society of the Dilettanti was organized (1733-34), with the idea of encouraging the arts, and thrived exceedingly well. It exerted an influence both on public taste and on the art of the British craftsmen. Its particular imprint lies on the architecture of the realm; for this was a great age of building in England.

Enough has been said to give some suggestion of the exciting life of the years after the Restoration to the accession of George II. New ideas of spiritual and intellectual aplomb, a developing economic prosperity, an impulse toward social coördination and political subdivision of the executive, all contributed to a civilization which was quite different from the medieval survival of the early seventeenth century. It gave greater scope to the larger number of individuals and contributed to the development of a certain self-consciousness which lies at the base of the sophistication of the eighteenth century. At the same time, the foreign influences which were coming in from both the European continent and the Orient were resulting in

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the eclectic taste which characterizes the last three quarters of that century.

In the colonies, where these changes in English life were mirrored, the period was one of an activity such as would scarcely have been predicted by the first settlers. The population was increasing very rapidly during the years after the Restoration in England. At the beginning of this period, around 1689, a population of about 200,000 was scattered through New England, the middle, and the southern colonies. By 1760 that population had increased to about 1,500,000—an increase of nearly eightfold. Most of this growth had come during our second period.

Commerce with England grew proportionately. In 1700 the trade between England and her American possessions was about one seventh of her total foreign trade. The imports from the colonies rose to over £1,000,000 and exports to more than £750,000. At the same time, this colonial traffic did more than anything else to develop the great merchant marine of the mother country, since it was carried on, perforce, in English-manned and English-built craft.

Twenty years of war between France and Eng-

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land were echoed in America. Constant danger from hostile Indians, massacres inspired by the French in Canada, kept the frontiers of New England in a state of guarded fear. The merchants of Boston and of New York profited handsomely by supplying the enemy of their king with munitions of war, constantly breaking the Navigation Laws of the crown. At this time the heavy hand of law-enforcement on a consistent scale was laid upon the colonies, creating the first feeling of pressure which gave rise to resentment against the home Government, often violently expressed in print.

Another offshoot of the wars in Europe was the growth of buccaneering and privateering. The news prints of the day are filled with accounts of pirates along the New England coast. The island of New Providence in the West Indies was mentioned as a pirate rendezvous, and many otherwise estimable gentlemen of Newport and Boston indulged freely in this unlawful business, dignifying its pursuit with the term privateering and relying on the hostility between England and France or Spain to cover their fault. We read, for instance, that at New York

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arrived four Privateers . . . who brought with them a Spanish prize. They loaded her at Cadiz. The loading on board the prize is said to consist of 350 Pipes of Wine and Brandy, 4000 Jars of Oyl, 400 Baskets of Rezins, some Currants, Anchovas and Olives, and 12 Bayles of Dry Goods.

Other captured ships contained gold and jewels, metals, silks, laces, pottery and furnishings.

The really important trade, however, was that with England, and letters exist which give us a clear idea of the direct import of luxuries from home. Two groups of these will give a picture of the typical import of the rich planters of the South, whose ships laden with tobacco returned with household furnishings and clothing for their families. These men had agents in London to whom they wrote their requirements and whose choice seems usually to have been satisfactory.

We shall quote at random from some of the letters of William Fitzhugh, a planter of Virginia, to his agent John Cooper. Under date of June 2, 1681, he writes:

In my particulars mentioned and here inclosed you'll find I send for a fether bed and furniture curtains and

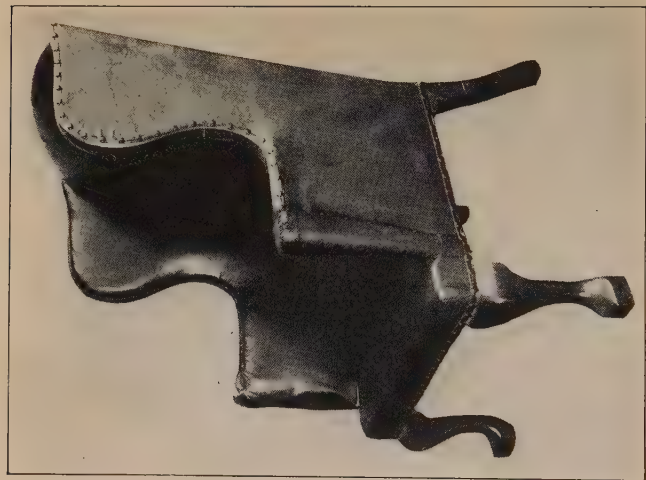
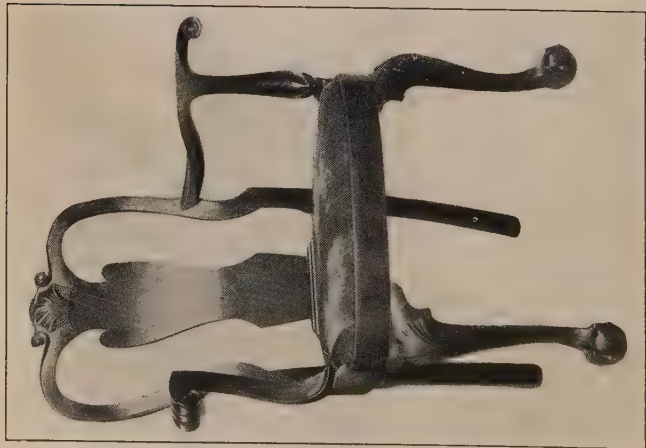


PLATE XXI

Arm-chair with splat back and cabriole legs and wing chair with variation of slipper foot

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vallens. [On June 7] . . . If you could procure me a Bricklayer or Carpenter or both it would do me a great kindness and save me a great deal of money in my present building and I should be willing to advance something extraordinary for the procuration. . . . If you send in any tradesmen be sure to send in their tools with them.

In 1682-83 he writes to Mrs. Sarah Bland in London, whose taste in textiles he must have admired:

. . . Please to procure me a Suit of Tapestry hanging for a Room twenty foot long, sixteen foot wide and nine foot high and half a dozen chairs suitable. . . . [In June, 1684] I have occasion for two pair of small Andirons for Chamber Chimneys, one pair of brass ones, with fire shovel and tongs and one pair of iron ones well glazed; with fire shovel and tongs, also two indifferent large iron backs for chimneys which I would have you send me by the first ships.

Various other items ordered between 1686 and 1689 may be taken at random:

A pair of middle sized silver candlesticks, a pair of snuffers and snuff dish, half a dozen trencher salts, the remainder in a handsome silver basin marked W.F.S.; also to add a large looking-glass with an olive wood frame and a pewter cistern; one dozen silver hafted knives, one dozen silver forks, one dozen silver spoons large and strong, one

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set castors, one three quart tankard, a pair of silver candlesticks less than them sent last year by Mr. Hayward but more substantial, one silver salvator plate [a salver], four silver porringers, two indifferent, two small ones, a small silver basin, one dozen silver plates, four silver dishes, two pretty large for a good joint of meat and two of a smaller sort; if my money falls short let it be wanting in the dishes; if there be any remaining at the Overplus be what it will laid out in Silver plates and let it all be thus marked W.F.S. and that coat of arms put upon all pieces that are proper especially the Dishes, plates and Tankards . . . ; . . . Pray let it be sent at the first conveniency . . . delivered at my landing. . . .

This is only a condensed summary of the things which Fitzhugh orders within ten years. Further quantities of silver are sent for, not only from London but from Bristol and Plymouth, and seals cut with his coat of arms but little or no furniture. He offers for sale, in exchange for other property, his plantations, and in describing his own house tells of "my Dwelling house furnished with all accommodations for a comfortable and gentile living, as a very good dwelling house with rooms in it, four of the best of them hung and nine of them plentifully furnished with all things necessary and convenient."

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In his will, dated April 9, 1700, he bequeathes large portions of land and quantities of slaves, cattle, and plate to his wife and each of his sons, the furniture to be divided between his wife and eldest son. One of the most suggestive items is that which gives to his son William his own and his wife's portraits and the other six pictures of his relations and the large map in his study. His study of books goes to his sons William and Henry, and the rest of his pictures and maps to his wife. Thus, within the year, such a man as William Fitzhugh received from London the latest fashions in silver and textiles, furniture and hangings, clothing and books.

Equally desirous of fine things was another Virginia gentleman, William Byrd. He had evidently a resident tailor, for as early as 1686 he addresses his agent, Mr. North:

Pray if possible procure me a tailor for mine is allmost free. One years tailors worke in my family is more than a tailor can be worth. Send me about two or a dozen suits of servants clothes ready made for a tryall. . . .

Byrd orders considerable furniture sent over from England. In 1688 he had purchased the Westover estate, then of twelve hundred acres, and began

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immediately to build him a house there,—not, however, the house standing at Westover to-day. In 1690 he writes to Daniel Horsmanden:

However, I design (God willing) to remove downe ye River abt 20 or 30 miles where I am now building & hope you will send us according to your promise your, with your fair Lady's picture to adorn my new house.

In 1689 he writes to Perry and Lane in London:

I desire by the first conveniency you would send me a Scretore (such as that I had of Garret) I would have it left at Ganlers att Towne itt being for my chamber there. Let him remember Ink Glasses for I had none with the last.

The next year he writes the same agents:

I am now building att Westopher & desire you to send me One Bed Bedstead, Curtains with all manner of furniture, chairs, table, looking-glass for a chamber to be Handsome & neat, but cheap; also 1 doz. best Rushia Lether chairs 1 small 1 middling and 1 large ovall table.

These, too, are only summary excerpts which will serve to suggest the scale of living amongst the wealthier planters of Virginia. Their houses, judging from their descriptions, followed somewhat the English fashion, with plentiful outhouses and dependencies. They were larger than those of New



PLATE XXII

Two pier tables, a tray-topped tea-table, and a small arm-chair showing the use of the cabriole leg with various types of feet

(The arm-chair is probably of New York make)

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England, with larger rooms, the heating problems being of lesser poignancy in the South.

A little farther north, near Philadelphia, we find William Penn in the 1680's ordering his dwelling-house, Pennsbury, to be built. Its length was sixty feet and its width forty, with outhouses additional. To quote from Penn's letters of 1685:

I would have a kitchen, two larders, a wash-house, a room to iron in, a brew house, and a Milan oven for baking, a stable for twelve horses; all my rooms I would have nine feet high and my stables eleven feet and overhead half a story. What you can, do with bricks. . . . The partition between the left parlor and the great room the servants used to eat in should be wainscotted up, the doors had best be large between the other parlor and the withdrawing room. . . . I have sent herewith four servants—three carpenters and a gardner.

In 1685 he writes:

Do not much hiring of carpenters and joiners. That I sent will do. . . . There comes also a Dutchman, a joiner and a carpenter that is to work one hundred and fifty days. . . . Let him wainscot and make tables and stands; But chiefly keep on the out houses because we shall bring much furniture. . . . Get some wooden chairs of walnut with long backs and two or three eating tables for twelve, eight and five persons with falling leaves to them.

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There is a lengthy list of the contents of *Pennsbury* which mentions on the upper floor four main chambers, a nursery, and a garret. On the lower floor were the best parlor, the other parlor, the little hall, and the great hall. These were all fully and adequately furnished. There were many tables and stands, cane chairs and leather chairs of various sizes, couches, clocks, satin, camblet, linen and wrought curtains, brasses, much silver, pewter, and linen. Also are listed silk blankets and white curtains, damask curtains, velvet and satin cushions, and a hanging press.

The description in 1704 of the city of New York written by *Madam Sarah Knight*, a Bostonian who rode to New York observing keenly all she saw en route, still remains the most vivid picture which we have of that city at the turn of the century:

The *Cittie* of New York is a pleasant, well compacted place. . . . The Buildings Brick Generally, very stately and high, though not altogether like ours in Boston. The Bricks in some of the Houses are of divers Coullers and laid in Checkers, being glazed look very agreeable. The inside of them are neat to admiration, the wooden work, for only the walls are plastered, and the Sumers and Girt are plained and kept very white scour'd as so is all the

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partitions if made of Bords. The fire places have no Jambs (as ours have) But the Backs run flush with the walls, and the Hearth is of Tyles and is as farr out into the Room at the Ends as before the fire, wch is generally Five foot in the Low'r rooms, and the peice over where the mantle tree should be is made as ours with Joyners work, and as I supose is fasten'd to iron roods inside. The House where the Vendue was, had Chimney Corners like ours, and they and the hearths were laid with the finest tile that I ever see, and the stair cases laid all with white tile which is ever clean, and so are the walls of the Kitchen which had a Brick floor.

At this time the Dutch atmosphere was still predominant, although the English occupancy dated from 1664. Throughout the period, however, the English were rapidly putting their stamp upon the town. From the first a trading center, the popularity of sales was great; contents of ships were auctioned on the wharf, contents of houses and shops sold on the premises. Madam Knight tells us of one of these sales and presents a picture of the city life which suggests one of the little Dutch paintings of realistic character which were so popular in the seventeenth century. She says:

They have vendues very frequently and make their Earnings very well by them, for they treat with good Liquor

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liberally, and the Customers Drink as Liberally and Generally pay for 't as well, by paying for that which they Bidd up Briskly for, after the sack has gone plentifully about, tho' sometimes good pennyworths are got there. Their Diversions in the winter is Riding Sleys about three or four miles out of town, where they have Houses of entertainment at a place called the Bowery, and some go to friends houses who handsomely treat them. Mr. Burroughs carry'd his spouse and Daughter and myself out to one Madame Dowes, a gentlewoman that lived at a farm House, who gave us a handsome Entertainment of five or six Dishes and choice Beer and metheglin, Cyder, etc., all which she said was the produce of her farm. I believe we mett 50 or 60 slays that day—they fly with great swiftnes and some are so furious that they'll turn out of the path for none except a Loaden Cart. Nor do they spare for any diversion the place affords, and sociable to a degree, they 'r Tables being as free to their Naybours as to themselves.

There was much luxury in the New York of the day. The collecting habit was particularly strong among the Dutch, who had a passion for ceramics of all sorts—the glazed earthenware of their own land as well as the porcelain or “burnt china” of the East. Almost every house had one or many cupboards filled with bric-à-brac, of pottery and porcelain. The walls were hung with many pictures,

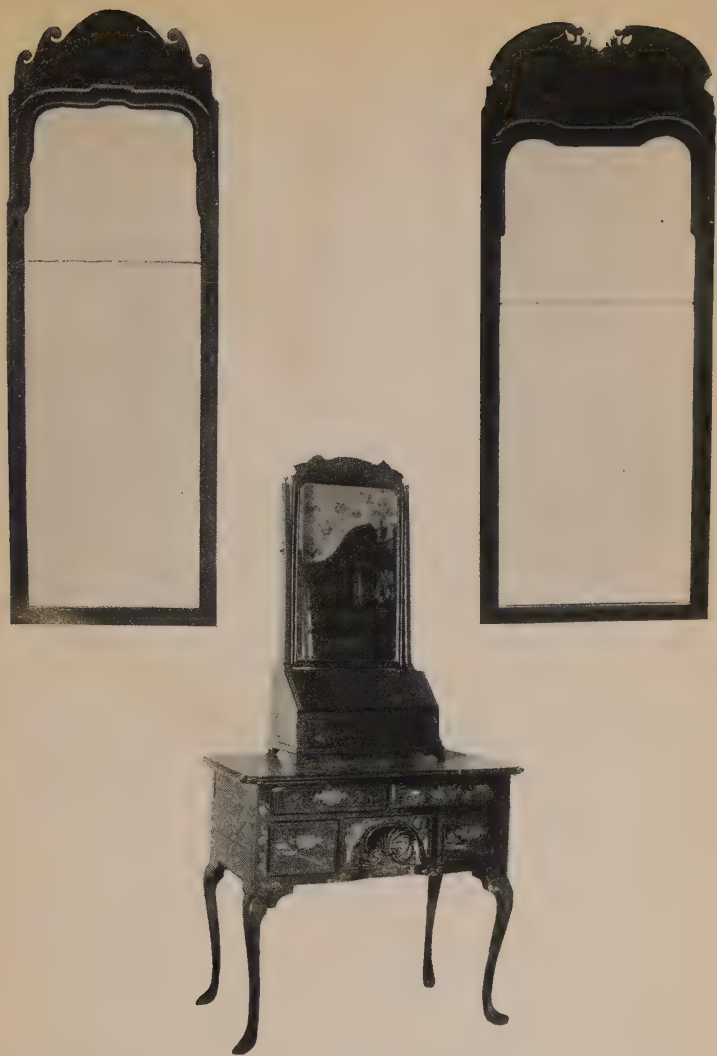


PLATE XXIII

Two walnut veneered looking-glasses, a dressing-glass,
and a japanned low-boy—all early Georgian

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large and small, portraits of members of the family, the king and queen, or landscape and flower pieces by the Dutch masters of the day.

In the will of the widow of Peter Stuyvesant, dated December 1, 1684, she leaves to her son Peter her "great and best case or cupboard . . ." and all the china and earthenware except "3 great pots." She leaves her cousin Nicholas her "black cabinet of ebonwood with the foot or frame belonging to it and the three great china pots before named." An inventory of 1688, probably of a merchant's possessions, lists "44 china carpets," Chinese weaves of some sort for tables, chests, and cup-boards.

In Boston there was an equal store of goods to be chosen from. All of these seaports were busy markets of distribution, and the auction sales were rivaled by the lotteries of which there was an epidemic. Money was plentiful and the great quantity of fine goods was sold promptly.

The changing taste of England and the Continent is seen in America. Quantities of Oriental china and textiles were coming over, cane chairs make frequent appearances after 1715, and chairs of Turkey-work continue to be used. Cupboards were, of course, particularly popular. Tapestry hangings, bed fur-

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niture of silk and needlework, cushions of velvet and damask gave color to the rooms. Silver, brass, and pewter were brightly polished. The walls were hung not only with paintings but with prints and decorative maps. Books are found of more general interest than before and contemporary English current magazines. Newspapers were started in several cities about this time,—the earliest, the Boston “News-Letter” begun in 1704,—and in them we find news items of local and foreign interest as well as quantities of advertisements. These advertisements are of particular help to our study. The idea of advertising was new in this country, the goods coming over in such quantities were, many of them, new to the colonists, and the advertisers go into most detailed descriptions of their stocks.

All up and down the Atlantic seaboard there was a hum of activity, a coming and going of ships, an exchange of ideas and commodities. The economic prosperity of the larger towns was accompanied by a social life which was highly organized. Social manners and customs, following closely those abroad, showed in the sophisticated and eclectic tastes which were developed.

The growing feeling of self-importance on the

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part of the middle class, the realistic attitude toward life which led men to look first to their own comforts and pleasures, the increased sources from which to derive pleasure and interest—all led to a multiplication of the luxuries and physical conveniences which surrounded the people in their daily life.

In governmental affairs, while no colonial policy was ever really worked out, there was a definite organization for the control and exploitation by England of her American possessions. The royal governors sent out were often men of prominence who set a certain standard of living. The rich merchants in many cases outdid the royal representative in the style of their domestic arrangements, although there was never attempted in America palatial living like that of the great nobles or rich landed gentry of the old country.

Economically the colonies were now a great asset to the Crown, so that they engaged the interested attention of those in high places as well as the financial backers and merchants of England. In fact, their prosperity was so great and their possibility of growth so well recognized that there was not a little fear on the part of the Government that the colonial

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manufacture and commerce might exceed and compete with that of the homeland. This jealousy led to the levying of certain laws and many restrictions on shipping and manufacture which began the first serious discontent and in a way drew the colonies together by the ties of supposedly unjust treatment more closely than their commercial relations would have done.

The period may be characterized, finally, as one of transition and one of consolidation. Transition between the medieval world and the modern, consolidation in the realm of political, social, and economic organization. In the development of taste in which these two characteristics were registered, the exotic or new ideas which were pouring into Europe and thence to America were being knit together into a self-conscious attitude toward the arts of living. Out of this eclectic taste there grew a unified set of preferences which led to the brilliant expression in stylistic terms, of the taste of the next seventy-five years.

THE FURNITURE

The furniture of the period of transition records in marked degree the changes of customs and man-

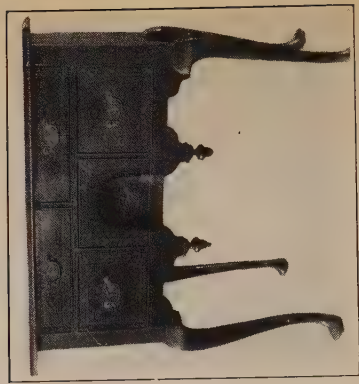
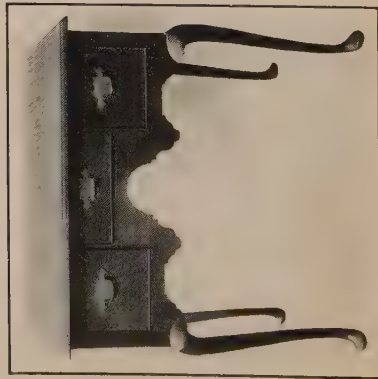
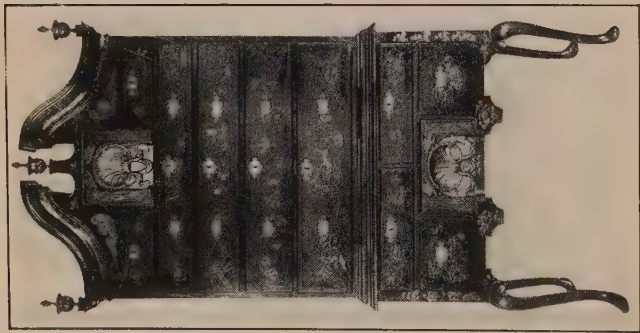


PLATE XXIV

Two low-boys and a japanned high-boy, the latter with the scrolled pediment—all early Georgian

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ners. None of the utilitarian arts expresses more fully or more surely the ways of life of a people, nor registers more accurately the changes in taste which that people experiences. Transitional periods, too, are of peculiar fascination, in that they presuppose a rapid succession of preferences for certain forms and detail, all tending toward an ultimate unity.

The traditions of the earlier period yielded to new ideas. Formerly the furniture built strongly for practical reasons and not too plentifully produced had often the quality of not being made or chosen for any particular location. This was a survival from the day when furniture was not permanently placed, but moved with other goods and chattels from one home to another. It lacked, perhaps, the self-conscious decorative feeling which comes from rooms filled with pieces which are closely related in scale or design or ornament or all three. Its chief unity came from the simplicity and practicality of its original forms and from the limitation of the technical methods of its construction and ornament. Its effectiveness—for this was great—arose from the accidental qualities or arrangement for practical ends rather than any studied composition.

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Before the third quarter of the seventeenth century the number of the furniture forms was few, as we have seen, although much variety was possible within the types. These forms were suitable for the comparatively simple living of the day. During the succeeding period, in which we are now interested, living became infinitely more complex and sophisticated, great attention being paid to furnishing and to decoration.

This change in ways of living was common to most of the nations of the western world and profoundly affected their strong artistic tradition. House-planning showed immediate response. Both in France and in England the introduction of corridors, hallways, and service staircases gave greater privacy to the rooms en suite which formerly had to be used for passage. Many smaller rooms for different purposes were introduced, the great hall no longer serving for eating, living, and general family use. Withdrawing rooms, parlors, dining-rooms, salons, music-rooms, libraries—all the rooms for special uses—took their places in elaborate house-planning in response to the more complicated social formality. England had her cue from France, where this change in planning had begun, and the

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English houses built from the time of the Restoration in 1660 onward found their decorative inspiration in the revived classic of the Renaissance, rapidly losing all traces of their medieval ancestry.

The period was one of as rapid a transition in architecture as it was in the less cumbersome arts. Inigo Jones, earlier in the seventeenth century, had brought forth in England architecture modeled on the lines of the Italian Renaissance. For some years after his finest work this field of architecture lay fallow, but a new impulse was given to its cultivation by the great fire of London in 1666. Providentially provided to meet the necessity, Christopher Wren built dozens of buildings in an architectural form entirely devoid of any trace of medievalism, imbued with the Renaissance feeling. From his time on, the classic background was permanently associated with English architecture.

This change was equally definite in America. The houses were now symmetrically planned; central halls, with flanking rooms, the interior treated with paneling, cornices, pilasters, and chair-rails. The disposition of openings was symmetrical when possible.

For these houses of a new type a new sort of furniture was predicated, furniture which should har-

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monize with its surroundings and should meet the requirements for the elaborated social customs of the day.

Here again came into England many foreign influences, from France and Italy, Holland and Spain, China and India. The background for the furniture design, like that of the architecture, was of classic derivation but only to a certain degree. The forms of the early Renaissance had come from study of monumental architecture of Roman days. As the Renaissance influence spread, it underwent a change in the direction of greater flexibility. Its eventual development was a school of design called the baroque, of which Michelangelo Buonarroti was the first protagonist. The chief innovation of the baroque school of design, as applied to architecture and furniture, was the free use of the classic architectural forms in decorative ways. The classic orders—that arrangement of vertical posts or columns and horizontal members or entablature—were developed from the necessities of primitive structural use.

The same was true of the arch as used by the Romans. In the earlier Renaissance these elements of design, while used decoratively, had always been



PLATE XXV

A fine paneled room built in Philadelphia about 1768, furnished with mahogany furniture showing full rococo influence

The Stylistic Evolution

employed with a distinct sense of their structural origin. In the baroque use this structural element in the classic forms is neglected. Columns were twisted or turned in decorative ways, entablatures curved outward or upward, pediments were broken in the middle, or their lines were curved. Their use was guided solely by a desire to obtain pleasing designs or patterns in relief of light and shadow.

In its development the baroque respected to some extent the rules of symmetry and balance and the sense of the architectural unity of forms. In its later stages these are disregarded.

It is this baroque school which lies behind a good deal of the furniture of the transitional period. Great designers published books filled with engraved plates of gorgeous ornament. These books, issued in France, Holland, and England, were widely circulated and created a certain unity of taste. The published designs of Le Pautre, the architect of much of the royal work of Louis XIV, give full expression to this style in France.

This new design and ornament appeared both on the exteriors and interiors of buildings. Interiors of houses came in for more or less elaborate treatment. In England it was used with greater re-

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straint, less freedom, than on the Continent. The English fondness for wainscoting continued, but the medieval form gave place to that based upon the new designs of which the classic arrangement of parts was the standard. Cornices topped the walls at the angle of wall and ceiling, a wall paneling divided into an upper wall and a lower repeated to some extent the relations of pedestal and column. A line at the height of the chair-rail subdivided these parts.

The panels were no longer the small ones of the oaken wainscot, but were large and surrounded by moldings. The wood was usually painted in colors, the moldings and detail might be picked out in gold. Velvets and damasks at times replaced solid paneling in wood, or tapestries were framed into the walls. Walls decoratively painted on the plaster or set with large paintings framed into them alternated with tapestries in popularity. A few wall-papers of repeating pattern and small in scale were also used.

Altogether the vocabulary of decoration was tremendously increased and new innovations and novelties were making their appearance every day. The furniture, of course, gave the greatest oppor-

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tunity for variety of effect. Beginning with the reign of Charles II, the new and fashionable furniture began to follow French influences. The nation was now looking abroad for ideas in a manner typical of its new state of mind.

More obviously characteristic than the changes in form which will be noted in the furniture were the decorative treatments of the period, for during these years virtually all of the decorative methods which ran through the whole eighteenth century, and are familiar to-day, came into use. To go back to the third quarter of the seventeenth century, we recall that the chief decorative treatments were the mechanical ones of turning, molding, and paneling, the freer ones of carving and painting. All of these were undergoing a change tending toward greater refinement, a more careful composition of design, and a more skilful craftsmanship and joinery. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes had sent to England many craftsmen from the Continent, men whose skill was superior to that of the native English workmen. These were further augmented by the workmen from the low countries who followed in the train of William of Orange. The royal architect and craftsman

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upon whom William looked with favor was Daniel Marot, who was chief designer for Louis XIV during the most sumptuous period of his reign. He was one of the Huguenot craftsmen who after 1685 transferred his activities to the court of William

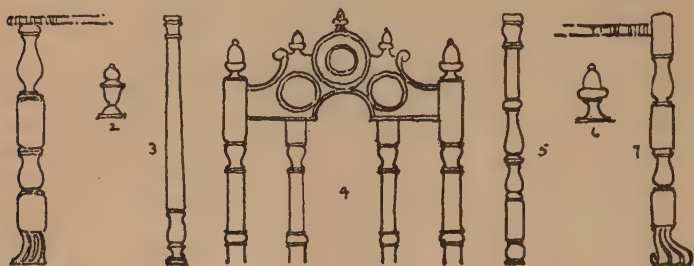


FIGURE 4—Turned legs with Spanish feet and other turned decoration of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, including a simple banister-back

of Orange. Marot's impress and that of other French designers is seen on the most significant furniture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England. Many cabinet-makers were coming to America from England, bringing with them the new fashions and the new standards of technical excellence.

The influx of new workmen into England from the Continent inaugurated the organization of the cabinet-makers as a special group of craftsmen.

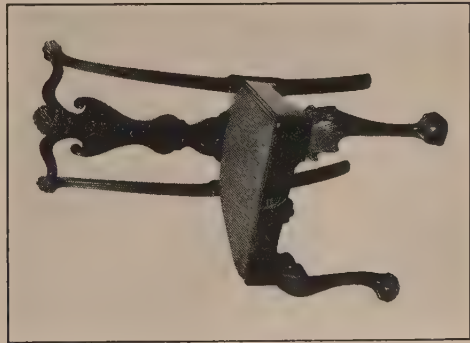
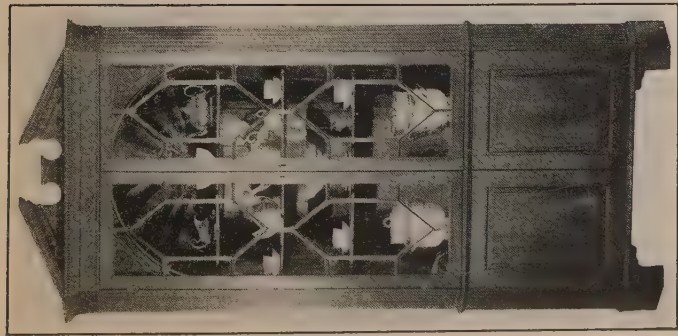


PLATE XXVI

Corner cupboard, splat-back chair, and secretary under Chippendale influence
(The chair retains the solid splat of the preceding period)

The Stylistic Evolution

Where formerly the joiner had built not only furniture but also wainscoting and the great wood roofs of halls and rooms, his place was taken by the man who made furniture only. The result of this specialization was immediate improvement in technical methods, more delicate construction, the expression of a design in the terms of the greatest economy of material. The strains and stresses were studied and met in the construction of the piece without relying on the heaviness and solidity of the various members. Thus vertical supports were reduced to a minimum, delicately turned or carved into curved forms.

Carving became a very finished thing. The designs are broad and rather larger in scale than in later times, but the modeling is infinitely superior to that of an earlier day, enhanced by the finer grained wood. Chair-backs and splats, stretchers and legs are often elaborately decorated with carving, and through this means curves for the first time begin to appear in the vertical structural members.

The Flemish scroll (Fig. 5), much affected by Marot, forms the basis of a good deal of the carved ornamental design. This curve was of several forms, the chief of which were composed of two cyma

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curves or flat S curves joined end to end, or an elongated S curve alone. It was used in the front legs of chairs and on chair-backs and stretchers carved ajouré, giving the first suggestion of the



FIGURE 5—Variations of the Flemish scroll as found in American pieces of the transitional period

curves which were to characterize the next period. Many other foreign suggestions for ornamental treatment may be enumerated.

Combined with turning on legs of tables and chairs, the so-called Spanish foot (Fig. 4) was popular. It supposedly came from Spain by way of the Low Countries and consists of a softly spreading scroll which turns under into a small volute at the bottom. A simplified form is square in plan, curving out slightly and vertically grooved.

Fine caning for chair-seats and backs came from the East, possibly to Portugal first from her col-

The Stylistic Evolution

onies in India. This gave a lightness and airiness to the chairs whose wooden parts were carved or turned.

The popularity of Chinese lacquer held wide sway. Oriental panels were imported, or pieces sent to the East were lacquered there. In imitation of this lacquer was the so-called japanning of local execution. The fad for japanning extended to the amateur and it became almost as much of a pleasant occupation for women as was needlework. Finer work, too, was done for the cabinet-makers by the regular japanners.

Still another form of decoration, at times resembling japanning, was the process of decalcomania, by means of which printed designs on thin paper were transferred to the wood and painted over with color and gold.

Veneers of elaborately figured wood added much to the decorative effect of certain pieces, an especially appropriate sort of decoration. Inlay in fine lines or delicately elaborate designs was an inheritance through Holland from Italy and Spain. The furniture, particularly, as it responded to colonial taste and usage, falls into two main groups. There is first the group of the last decade of the seven-

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teenth century and the first decade of the eighteenth century which marks the transition from the Jacobean and Stuart types to those of the reigns of William and Mary and of Anne—the late Renaissance to the baroque. The second group shows the effects of the improved craftsmanship of the cabinet-maker, the influx of new ideas from near and far, and the change in the treatment of the structure where the influence of the baroque has passed from the purely ornamental parts to the structural ones. Both of these groups include forms which are particularly adaptable to modern use.

Oak, which had formerly controlled the technique of the joiner in his structural and decorative treatments, was replaced by finer-grained woods. The walnut-trees, planted to replace the oak forests which the terrific ship-building of Elizabeth's day had devastated, were just at the proper state for felling. In America there was an abundance of both oak and walnut. This change in material was necessitated by the different decorative treatments. Carving predominated as a method combined with turning, but carving less bold, more completely modeled, and in chairs at least frequently adjouré or pierced.



PLATE XXVII

Mahogany card-tables with straight molded legs under Chippendale influence, and a Connecticut block-front desk with unusual interior fittings made of cherry

The Stylistic Evolution

Let us trace the development in America of furniture forms from the few simple articles of the earlier period. We saw the first steps in the development of the chest into the chest of drawers and high-boy, the desk-box into the desk, the tables of different sorts, the chairs, stools, and benches. Now begins a further development of these forms toward their ultimate end.

The chest family still retains a preëminent position but is treated in many ways. There are low chests of drawers and high chests—or, in modern parlance, high-boys. There is also the chest-on-chest which resembled a high-boy except that its lower section was a solid chest of drawers. The low long chest with hinged lid disappears as a characteristic form in this period.

The desk develops fully with three or four drawers below the slant-top. Some examples retain the subdivisions of desk and low supporting framework, but these are seldom of high quality.

Chairs from this time on are very characteristic pieces. They no longer imply formality but are used commonly in all houses. The forms develop from the old types, but change rapidly with the introduction of new decorative motifs, new materials,

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and new ways of treating these in relation to structure. Settees and couches appear in greater numbers, stools and benches are fewer.

Profoundly affecting the popularity of certain pieces was the detail of new social custom. The practice of tea- and chocolate-taking called forth new sorts of furniture and utensils. The conviviality of the tea hour was synonymous with a quiet gossip, hence many small chairs, which could be drawn in close together about the tea-table. Changes of costume, too, had their effect. At the beginning of the period and almost to its end, women's skirts were not unduly wide nor worn over hoops; at the same time, tight lacing of the bodice was in vogue. To suit this fashionable wear, the chairs needed not to be wide, and the backs could be high and straight. As fashion began to dictate the wide skirt, which was carried to extremes in the middle of the century, chairs were widened to accommodate them, the backs still remaining primly straight. More comfortable chairs, upholstered in textiles or leather, were furnished for the men, chairs built to lounge in.

Tables were of many kinds, the popularity of the collapsible sorts continuing. The tea-drinking cus-

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tom required numerous tables which could be folded up and put out of the way when not in use. The tip-top table, invented in this period, met this purpose and had great popularity. Small stands for tea-kettles, higher stands for candles were treated decoratively. Card-playing was excessive and folding tables for gaming shared with the tea-tables in general use.

Dressing-tables, too, followed the lines of the low portion of the high chests and frequently matched in decoration, giving us the matching high-boy and low-boy which we see to-day. This idea of pieces of furniture matching in decoration and design is a new development of the period and an important one, bespeaking a self-conscious effort at consistency in decorative effect. Sets of chairs with matching side and arm-chairs had often a couch or settee of the same design. Tea-tables and kettle-stands preserved often the same form and decoration.

The rage for collecting small objects of all sorts suggested the construction of cabinets for the display of such collections. These were supplemented by the use of open shelves, sometimes pyramidal in arrangement, on which dozens of small pieces could

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be shown. Corner cabinets, both built-in and as separate pieces of furniture, were popular.

The development and elaboration of these many furniture forms were just as marked in America as it was abroad. Making allowance for the fact that the more magnificent pieces such as are seen to-day in great English houses were not appropriate to the colonial homes, the essential elements of all of these were taken up here.

We may say that the period begins with a survival of the old rectangular construction and the old methods of decoration, the latter showing signs of greater refinement, and ends in a new curvilinear construction, almost plastic in its modeling, and ornamented by many new methods which largely take the place of more primitive ones.

The chairs form the prime indication of change of structure and decoration. Two of the best types of the early part of the period are the banister-back and the caned chairs (Plate XVI). The banister-back chair is characteristically American. Its back, with carved cresting, in the finest examples ajouré, was composed of turned back-posts with between them split turned balusters with the flat side turned toward the front. The seats of these



PLATE XXVIII

Philadelphia high-boy and low-boy in walnut with gilded and ebonized moldings of the finest workmanship

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were rush or splint. The cane chairs were similarly constructed, but instead of banisters had a splat made up of two vertical pieces some distance apart, the space between filled in with cane. The seats were caned and the wood blackened with paint or lamp-black in imitation of ebony.

Both of these types were popular, particularly the cane, many of which were probably brought from England. In the list of furniture from Pennsbury, dated about 1700, are mentioned a large number of these cane chairs, seemingly in sets of six for each chamber. In the best parlor were "one couch, two great cane chairs and four small ditto, seven cushions—four of these satin, three others green plush." A "great leather chair" was in the other parlor and six leather chairs in the small hall. Six wooden chairs are in one chamber, with a wrought bed.

The arm-chairs of these two types were broad and roomy, handsomely proportioned, the sides spreading out hospitably. The legs were turned, and turned rungs strengthened the construction. The front legs were carved with the Flemish scroll or the Spanish foot, or were simply turned, ending in a ball foot. The Spanish foot and the ball foot

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were usual on the banister-back chairs. Loose cushions of fine material covered the rush, splint, or cane seats. Couches or day-beds followed the chair designs.

A simple rendition of the banister-back substituted narrow molded boards for the turned banisters, these usually being combined with a very simple uncarved cresting.

There is frequent mention throughout the period of "Russia-leather" and Turkey-work chairs. These were undoubtedly of the type which we have included in the earlier period—the so-called Cromwellian chairs, with bead or sausage turning, simple rectangular pieces with little of the frame showing except the under-structure. The slat-back chair, with members lightened, with higher back and more slats, the posts turned between the slats, is found at this time and continuously through the century as a provincial rendition of an early form.

The beds were probably merely crude frames which were covered by the hangings. They were of two types, the finer being the high post bedstead, the simpler the "pallet bed," a low simple piece for unimportant rooms. The English beds of the time were gorgeous affairs with elaborately molded and

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paneled head-boards and testers, covered with velvet and silk glued to the wood and hung with matching material. Few of these, probably, were ever seen in America. However, the tradition of the bed as an important possession is strongly recorded here. Wills and inventories mention beds with all their accessories—as, for instance, “a bed and bedstead with curtains, vallens, blankets, bolster, pillows and other furniture thereto belonging.” A value of ten pounds or over is attached to such a piece, or an equivalent of nearly three hundred dollars.

The tables include very largely drop-leaf ones, with turned legs and gates, or smaller ones with flaps to support the leaves.

The low-boys, or dressing-tables (Plate XVII), are a reduced version of the lower portion of the high-boys, the skirting cut to the same design, the legs and drops (if central legs are omitted) following those of the high-boy.

Chests and drawers are simple. The drawer-fronts are plain, the feet are turned balls. The framework surrounding the drawers is finished with a single- or double-arch molding which follows around drawers and up the sides of the case (Fig.

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7). High-boys are supported upon frameworks with turned legs—sometimes four in front, sometimes two. The legs are connected with stretchers cut out to curves which are brought into pleasant pattern, either crossing in the center or following the legs with receding curves between. The turn-

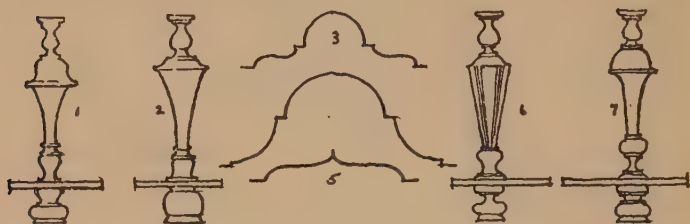


FIGURE 6—Turned legs and profiles of skirtings found in high-boys and low-boys of the early eighteenth century

ings of these legs are often very fine. There are several types of turning—vase turning, trumpet turning, cup turning, and bell turning, all called from the profile of the chief element in the turned design (Fig. 6.). The fronts, if the piece be not a solid one of one wood, are frequently veneered with figured woods, burled walnut, burled ash, butternut, and other materials whose grain is highly decorative.

Desks follow the same general scheme. The legs, in ball shape, are turned, the slant tops and



PLATE XXIX

Two Chippendale-style chairs and a clock, all of Philadelphia
make

(The elaborate carving is typical of the third quarter of the
eighteenth century)

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drawer-fronts either of solid wood or veneered, while the arch moldings surround the drawers. A simple arrangement of pigeonholes completes the interior. Some of these have the well, just above the upper drawer, entered through a sliding cover on the desk-top. Some of the desks have a supporting framework with the separate box of the slant-topped desk set upon it.

Looking-glasses for the first time begin to be usual. The Vauxhall glass of the period—a thick glass with beveled edge—was high in fashion. The glass was made in comparatively small plates, so that it is unusual to find large mirrors of the period, except those made up of two or more plates. There are two kinds of looking-glass—the vertical wall-mirror and the horizontal mantel-mirror.

The frames of the wall-mirrors are generally veneered in figured walnut, some are ebonized and japanned. The tall narrow shape is the rule. The bottom is usually rectangular. The top breaks up in a series of cyma curves, sometimes recalling the popular Flemish curve, sometimes suggesting rather a Chinese feeling. The upper panel of the glass is often cut with a design of scrolls or a crown with flowing leaves branching from it.

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These pieces in their typical treatments are the significant ones of the first part of the transition, and are the sort of thing which was made from a few years before 1700 until a decade after. All such changes in the utilitarian arts occur gradually, and it is as unwise as it is unnecessary to attempt any meticulous dating. We find fashions of many years' use mingling with those of the last month. It is rather the spirit and essential qualities of particular groups—the elementary things which give them unity within themselves—which we must seek to find.

While the methods of baroque ornamentation were taking their places in the cabinet-maker's vocabulary of expression, the actual structure was undergoing a change due to the penetration of the curval influence beyond the decorative elements into the structural. This change began in the reign of Queen Anne, who died in 1714, but came to its complete expression during the reign of George I. Resulting from the greatly improved craftsmanship and refinement of structure, the baroque forms, based preferably upon the curved rather than the straight line, began to affect the structure.

Under this influence the chair-backs which had

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formerly been straight, with straight turned posts supporting a cresting set at right angles, are built up on curved lines. The first step is a bow-shaped curve in the top, this set upon vertical turned posts. Next the posts themselves follow a gentle S curve, slightly inward at the base, then outward toward the top, the curve of the top running without break into the curve of the posts (Fig. 9). Turning is wholly omitted here. The legs, no longer turned, follow the same curve and are subtly modeled. We have here the beginning of the cabriole leg (Fig. 8). The chair-seats, instead of having straight fronts and sides, are curved in plan. Thus it will be seen that the gradual evolution from the simplest rectangular construction has, through the introduction of carving, ultimately produced a form built up on curved structural members.

The use of the curve, once started, continued unchecked, and was applied to all of the structural elements of all furniture forms, chairs, tables, desks, high-boys, low-boys, and chests of drawers. Architectural forms such as the pediment, often applied to furniture, were affected, and the scrolled pediment (Plate XXIV) took its place as an important element.

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The most important single contribution to the elements of structure, resulting from this influence is the cabriole leg. Its origins are shrouded in mystery. Some aver it to have derived from the Chinese use of animal or dragon legs in furniture. Its name would suggest, as one English critic says, that it is of continental European origin and took its suggestion from the goat leg. And again the *pied de biche* or doe foot of frequent use in France at the time of Louis XIV contains plentiful suggestion for the start of the cabriole.

The cabriole leg is a subtly modeled form with a broad curving "knee" tapering to a narrow "ankle" and spreading again into a foot (Fig. 8). Its making calls upon more than the ordinary joiner's methods. It is carved out of the solid, and in its best guise has a strong supporting effect both in the quality of its reverse curve and its relation to a vertical line of support which may be considered to run through it.

The simplest and earliest foot, which is virtually the only one coming within this period, is a club foot—a plain, flat foot spreading out at the bottom. This cabriole leg was used in all positions where before the turned leg had occurred. On



PLATE XXX

Two arm-chairs of Chippendale type, and a fire-screen with cabriole legs and finely turned stem

The Stylistic Evolution

chairs it became the rule. It is found on high- and low-boys, tables, chests of drawers, desks, couches, and stools.

By the end of the first quarter of the century, when this cabriole leg was coming into use, walnut had pretty well established its position as a cabinet wood, and the greater number of these early cabriole pieces in America are executed in that wood. Walnut was, however, by no means the only wood used at this time. Fruit woods such as apple, cherry, and pear, as well as maple, all possessed the requisite fineness of grain for the new methods of working. Mahogany, too, was just beginning to come into favor, but chiefly for case furniture.

With the use of the cabriole we find an increased sophistication of ornament and a greater refinement of craftsmanship. Inlay in bandings of light and dark woods or star forms (Fig. 7), carving of a rather superior sort, occasionally gilded, fine bead moldings, and japanning or imitation lacquer are all employed.

The chairs point sharply the contrast with their immediate predecessors. Their structure is based upon the use of curved members, the curve of the

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back cresting, running without break into those of the back posts, the curved horseshoe form of the seat-rail, and the cyma curve of the cabriole all harmonizing subtly. The back, from the seat up, curves doubly in a sort of spoon form, while the rear legs below the seat curve backward.

The central part of the back is a solid wooden splat, whose origin may be found in some of the central solid splats used to reinforce or to add enrichment to the cane chairs. These splats are sometimes cut to the "violin" form, sometimes in a "vase" form, recalling the shapes of the Chinese vases so popular among collectors of the day.

Arm-chairs with upholstered backs and seats but with wooden arms, and high-backed wing chairs all were made with the cabriole. Settees, too, showed flowing lines with out-curving arms and back whose silhouette was that of a wing chair with the wings turned outward at the sides. Small stools, too, follow the mode.

Many fine high-boys and low-boys are of this period, walnut veneered and with delicate inlay (Fig. 7). Two cabriole legs in the front are the rule, with turned drops at each side of the center

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where once stood the turned legs of the earlier high-boy.

There were tables of many sorts—small rectangular tea-tables, with and without tray top and with the skirting cut to a silhouette of curves; tripod tables, particularly popular, with a turned center shaft supported upon three cabriole legs. The

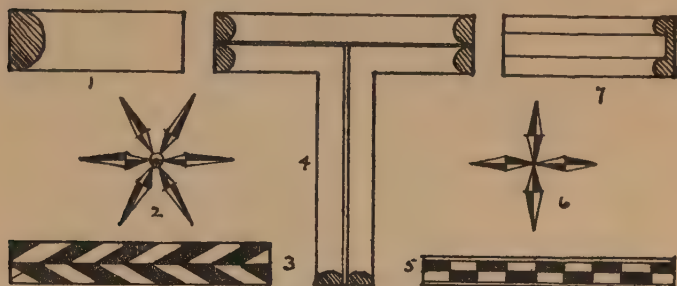


FIGURE 7—Some arch moldings and inlay designs of the first quarter of the eighteenth century

tops are usually hinged to tip, and the edges of the tops may be plain or molded like a tray. The drop-leaf tables of all sizes continued in popularity, and with slight adaptation employed the cabriole leg, the tops rectangular, oval, or round.

Following closely the designs of the tables were the fire-screens and candle-stands with cabriole legs.

Clocks were not unusual at this period, although

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for some reason they are very rare now. The popular clock of the seventeenth century had been the wall-clock set on a bracket, with the weights hanging below. During this second period, in the early part of the eighteenth century, we find many advertisements of clock-makers, who advertise to convert the wall-clock of this type into tall case clocks or pendulum shelf-clocks.

There are records which tell us of such clocks in japanned cases, but mostly they were of the popular walnut. The case design is an excellent expression of the practical needs—an upper section with the face and works, topped by a cornice straight or slightly curved; a high narrow case to contain the weights and pendulum, and below it a lower base section to give stability to the design. The feet are small and turned.

The mirrors continue the form with the top of intricate curves, some of them with gilded moldings. The glasses are not large and are usually beveled.

Card-tables with flap leaves, wooden- or baised-topped, follow the regular form, with a hinged leg to support the flap when open. Console or pier tables with marble tops were handsome examples of the style.

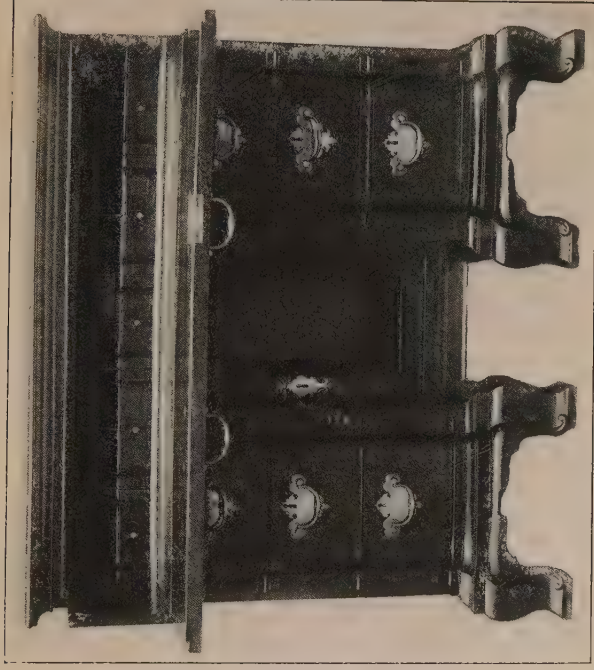
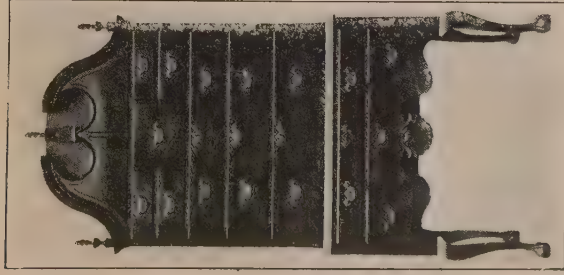


PLATE XXXI

A high-boy and a shell block-front desk attributed to Goddard, and a "Grandmother's" clock by Claggett—all of Newport, R. I.

The Stylistic Evolution

The full development of the forms of the last part of this period evidence the practical evolution of a style. Throughout the period there was this trying out of new forms and ornaments, ideas from far and near. All these innovations were tentative and experimental, but year by year the cabinet-makers increased their skill, solving problems of construction so as measurably to lighten their work. Stretchers were eliminated from the legs of chairs, tables, and high-boys, the finer construction serving to support itself in spite of its seemingly greater lightness.

The mechanical forms of ornamentation,—turning, mitered moldings, appliqué,—as well as the cruder types of carving, are gradually discarded, and the more skilful forms—veneers, inlay, japanning, and a small amount of well-modeled carving—take their place.

From these various try-outs, one after another, there evolved this consistent style, the cabriole, following the first suggestion of rococo design, interpreted in a restrained manner. At last we have chairs, tables, desks, high-boys, and low-boys, all related by an essential element of their structure.

Thus the ground is cleared for that great battle

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of the styles which was to rage well into the nineteenth century. Style has become a self-conscious thing, not the result of peculiarly inherent qualities which appear unconsciously. With this stylistic

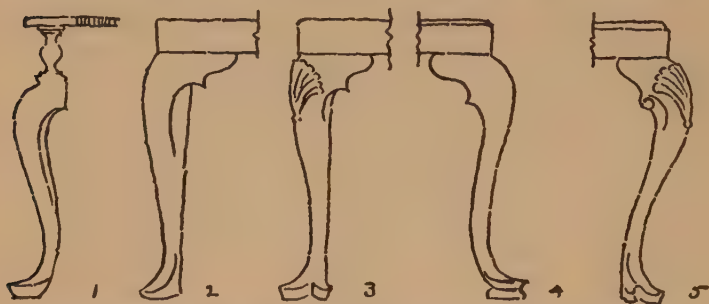


FIGURE 8—Various examples of the cabriole legs of the second quarter of the eighteenth century (No. 1 shows a transitional form with a turned member at the top)

evolution accomplished the cabinet-makers were free to express in highly varied ways their own taste and that of their patrons.

The consolidating spirit of the age had expressed itself in artistic forms harmonizing many seemingly unrelated elements into a unified style which, if analyzed, confesses its debt to many sources and provides a basis for future development and elaboration of its forms.

True to the temper of the age, a distinct develop-

The Stylistic Evolution

ment of schools of design is seen in America; or, rather, distinct differences between the work of groups of cabinet-makers in different parts of the country. In the beginning of this cabriole style



FIGURE 9—Solid splat designs for chairs of the second quarter of the eighteenth century

there are several examples from both New England and the middle States. From about Philadelphia comes perhaps the finest group of furniture of this type. Each of these groups, while working within the style, has its peculiar ways of constructing and ornamenting.

A great deal of furniture must have been made in New York during this time, before the definite stylization of the mid-eighteenth century had established itself. A few pieces of the early cabriole type exist which from their history would seem to

Early American Furniture

be of New York provenance. From their peculiarities some future knowledge may come to tell us what the early eighteenth-century New York furniture was like.



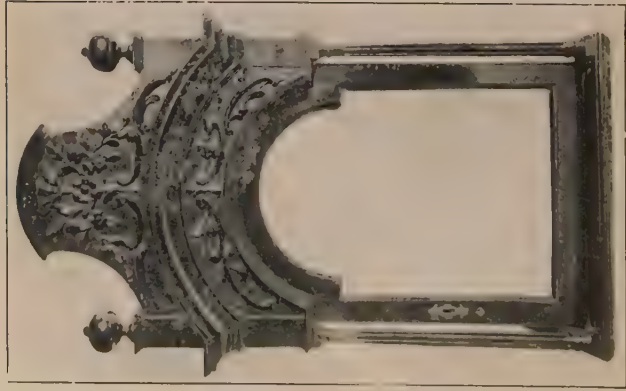


PLATE XXXII

Details of typical Philadelphia carved ornament in mahogany, of the third quarter of the eighteenth century



CHAPTER IV

STYLISTIC ATTAINMENT AND ROCOCO INFLUENCE

COLONIAL ENGLAND

THE consolidating effects of the somewhat hectic years of the transition are fully seen in the succeeding period, which begins about 1730. For a time now, England and her colonies develop a closer relationship and devote themselves to the arts of peace. The equipment for their practice came from a unified taste which had evolved from the experimentation of the preceding half-century, a taste which was, however, eclectic in the extreme. It expressed a social order highly organized, a critical sense based upon study and observation, a high standard of technical accomplishment, and a patronage, by the rich and powerful, of arts and letters.

In America the same characteristics are felt. The colonies are bound closely together by their rela-

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tions, political, economic, and social. Their differences, such as they are, are the result of the closeness of their interests. The relations with England are equally intimate and for this reason productive at times of friction. Royal governors come and go, rich Americans send their sons to England for travel and study, the Atlantic seeming to join rather than separate the two lands.

Again we sense a change in the temper of the English-speaking peoples, a change which expressed itself in the cultural activities of the time. Emotional and temperamental changes often occur as reactions from a former existing state of mind. In this case the realism and rule of reason, the cynicism and levity of a highly selfish era are gradually replaced by a pronounced romanticism, sentimentality, and a growth of imagination. It is here that we find the beginnings of that nineteenth-century period of the Romanticists and the cravings, primarily romantic, which also developed the classic revival. The growth of imagination produced the fanciful extravagances of the *Chinoiserie*, the *Persanerie*, and the play of humor in literature, and the fine and utilitarian arts.

True to this changed temper, the nation expresses

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itself in things of the mind, the spirit, and the emotions—religious reforms, music, literature, the visual arts and industrial advancement. William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, in his high-minded leadership of the patriot party, called forth the higher elements of his people's patriotism and, widening the insular viewpoint of Robert Walpole's calculating rule, gave them a vision of their own relation to their country and to other nations. The beginnings of England's supremacy in India were established by Clive, while Wolfe's capture of Quebec in 1759 established the English dominion in America. This acquisition of both the ancient civilization of the East and the great undeveloped resources of the West gave to the English—and to the Colonials too—a glow of pride in their wide expanding empire.

On this side of the Atlantic close touch was kept with all of the activities of the motherland. Portraits of the king and queen, of Pitt and his associates, found places in nearly every home. The interest ran particularly high when important matters of colonial policy came under discussion in London, and the broader-visioned leaders were given an approving admiration in America which they, in England, could scarcely appreciate.

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At the same time that this new patriotism and imagination were leading England into her great part in world drama, within the country herself the aspect of her life and the very structure of her society were being revolutionized by new methods of transportation and manufacture. Here lies the germ which was to change the country from the agricultural England of the old days into the industrial England of the nineteenth century.

Concomitant with these—the new point of view toward the country and the world at large, changes in political, social, and industrial practice—is the rise of the democratic spirit which in so short a time was to result, through suffering and bloodshed, in the Republic of the United States of America, established on the foundation of human freedom and equality.

All of the vital changes in the basic qualities of English life were reflected in that of her American colonies. Settled conditions resulted in a perfecting of that ordered social existence which had already developed. A great merchant marine brought contacts with all parts of the world, together with increasing prosperity. Manufacturing industries grew up and flourished, rendering the colonies vir-

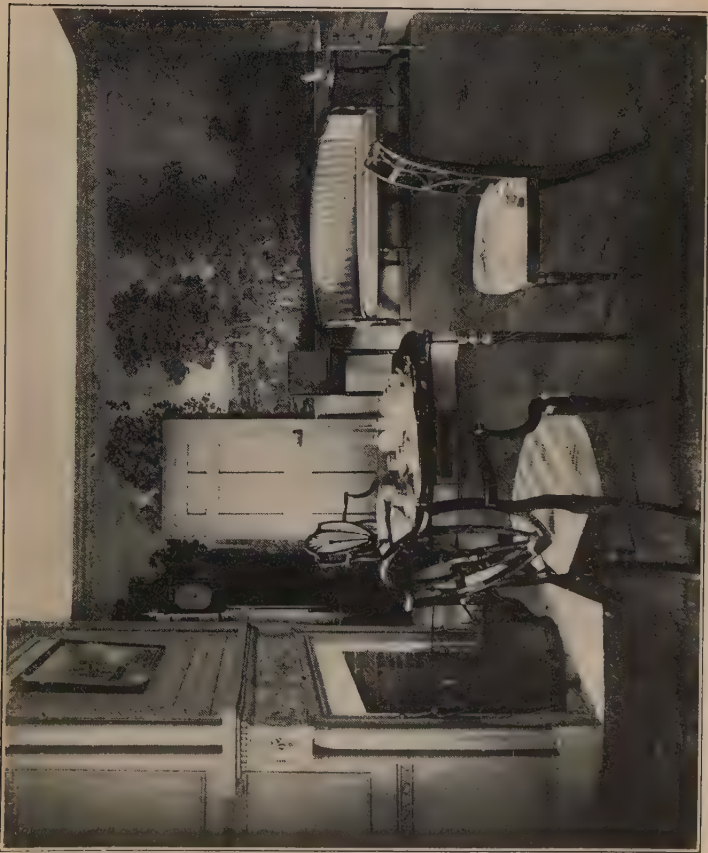


PLATE XXXIII

A room of the Early Republic, with delicate woodwork, picture wall-paper, and furniture confessing Hepplewhite and Sheraton influences

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

tually sufficient unto themselves. There was a constant influx of workmen from abroad who kept up the standards of technical accomplishment.

A miniature aristocracy of wealth had developed up and down the coast, and colonial politics rested chiefly in the hands of those whose position was based on wealth, social standing, or official connection. The wealth which formed the basis was acquired in the South chiefly from the great plantations, in the North from commerce. The seaports were busy marts, drawing from all nations. Charleston in South Carolina, where lived the rich planters of the rice-fields, was one of the chief commercial centers of America. In the year 1764, three hundred and sixty vessels cleared from her port, virtually one for every day in the year.

The second William Byrd inherited in Virginia twenty-six thousand acres and left to his son one hundred and seventy-nine thousand acres of the best Virginia lands, an enormous increase over that which his father had originally taken up. These Virginia gentlemen lived on their land and exported from their own wharves tobacco which English commission merchants sold in London.

The great estates of the Hudson Valley, rivaling

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the Virginia plantations in extent, were owned by such men as Van Rensselaer, Phillipse, Cortland, and Livingston, who were connected with the rich merchant families of New York by birth or marriage.

Such large properties were not common in Pennsylvania, Delaware, or the New England colonies, but people in these localities built up valuable estates through shrewd business practices.

Export of food-stuffs to the West Indies, fishing and ship-building, distilling, and other industries accounted for cargoes of countless ships which sailed from Boston, Newport, New York, and Philadelphia. These, returning from the West Indies, the Azores, many European ports, and the African coast, brought wine and slaves and all kinds of English manufactured goods.

With all of this import came news and ideas from abroad which gave the colonists of the seacoast a complete sense of their connection with Europe. This was seen in the pride felt by most colonial aristocrats in the fact that their houses were furnished in the best English fashion, that their thoughts ran parallel to those of the cultivated Englishman, and that the food they ate, the silver and

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

china they ate it from, and the very clothes upon their backs were of the most fashionable mode in London.

We have a complete knowledge of the commodities of the day, from letters, books, inventories, and wills, as well as from the manifold advertisements which appeared in the newspapers. The old system of detailed inventories, room by room, in the English form, was usual in this country, and it was also still a time when advertising was done in great detail, year by year introducing new luxuries to the buying public.

We have glimpses of several American cities in the account of his journey through the colonies in 1748-49 by Peter Kalm, Professor of Economy in the University of Aobo in Swedish Finland. We shall quote only excerpts which have significance to us in presenting the aspect of some of the chief cities as they were at the middle of the century.

Of Philadelphia he writes in September, 1748:

The streets are regular, fine, and most of them are fifty foot broad. . . . In most of the streets is a pavement of flags, a fathom or more broad. . . . The houses make a good appearance, are frequently several stories high, and built either of bricks or of stone, but the former

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are more commonly used, since bricks are made before the town and are well burnt. The stone . . . is a mixture of black or grey glimmer and quite small grained limestone. . . . The houses are covered with shingles . . . from . . . the white cedar. The roof is very light . . . but at present this wood is almost destroyed. . . . Philadelphia reaps the greatest profits from its trade to the West Indies for thither the inhabitants ship almost every day a quantity of flour, flesh, butter and other victuals; timber, plant and the like. In return they receive either sugar, molasses, rum, indigo, mahogany . . . or ready money. The true mahogany which grows in Jamaica is at present almost all cut down. . . . They send both West India goods and their own productions to England. [Sept. 21, 1748]. Most of the inhabitants [of Germantown] are tradesmen and make almost everything in such quantity and perfection that in a short time this province will want very little from England. . . . [Sept. 29, 1748] The English ladies are much inclined to have fine flowers all the summer long, in or upon the chimneys, sometimes upon a table, or before the windows either on account of their fine appearance or for the sake of their sweet scent.

In November, Kalm was in New York and had much of interest to say of that infant metropolis:

The streets do not run so straight as those of Philadelphia and have sometimes considerable bendings. . . . In the chief streets there are trees planted, which in summer



PLATE XXXIV

Four chairs of the Early Republic, confessing Sheraton and French Directoire influence

(Upper right and lower left by Duncan Phyfe)

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give them a fine appearance. . . . I found it extremely pleasant to walk in the town, for it seemed quite like a garden, the trees which are planted for this purpose are chiefly of two kinds—the water beech . . . the Locust is likewise frequent: its fine leaves and the odoriferous scent, make it very proper for being planted in the streets near the houses, and in gardens. . . . Besides numbers of birds . . . which make these trees their abode, there are likewise a kind of frogs which frequent them in great numbers in summer. They are very clamorous in the evening and in the nights (especially when the days had been hot, and a rain was expected) and in a manner drown the singing of the birds. . . . Most of the houses are built of bricks; and are generally strong and neat, and several stories high. Some had, according to old architecture, turned the gable-ends toward the streets: but the new houses were altered in this respect. Many of the houses had a balcony on the roof on which the people used to sit in the evenings in the summer season; and from thence they had a pleasant view of a great part of the town, and likewise a part of the adjacent water and of the opposite shore. . . . The walls were white washed within, and I did not anywhere see hangings, with which the people in this country seem in general to be but little acquainted. The walls were quite covered with all sorts of drawings and pictures in small frames. On each side of the chimneys they had usually a sort of alcove; and the wall under the windows was wainscoted, and had benches placed near it. The alcoves, and all the woodwork were painted a bluish grey color. . . .

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New York probably carries on a more extensive commerce than any town in the English North American provinces; at least it may be said to equal them: Boston and Philadelphia however come very near up to it. The trade of New York extends to many places and it is said they send more ships from thence to London than they do from Philadelphia. They export to that capital all the various sorts of skins which they buy of the Indians, sugar, logwood, and other dying woods, rum, mahogany and many other goods which are the produce of the West Indies together with all the specie which they get in the course of trade. Every year they build several ships here, which are sent to London and there sold; and of late years they have shipped a quantity of iron to England. In return for these, they import from London stuffs and every other article of English growth or manufacture, together with all sorts of foreign goods. England, and especially London, profits immensely by its trade with the American colonies; for not only New York, but likewise all the other English towns on the continent import so many articles from England, that all their specie, together with the goods which they get in other countries, must altogether go to Old England in order to pay the amount to which they are however insufficient. From hence it appears how much a well regulated colony contributes to the increase and wealth of its mother country. . . . It is however of great advantage to the crown of England, that the North American colonies are near a country, under the government of the French, like Canada. There is reason to believe that the king never was earnest

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in his attempts to expel the French from their possessions there; though it might have been done with little difficulty. For the English colonies in this part of the world have increased so much in their number of inhabitants and in their riches, that they almost vie with old England. Now in order to keep up the authority and trade of their mother country, and to answer several other purposes, they are forbid to establish new manufactures, which would turn to the disadvantage of the British commerce: they are not allowed to dig for any gold or silver, unless they send them to England immediately: they have not the liberty of trading to any parts that do not belong to the British dominions, excepting some settled places, and foreign traders are not allowed to send their ships to them. These and some other restrictions occasion the inhabitants of the English colonies to grow less tender for their mother country. This coldness is kept up by the many foreigners such as Germans Dutch and French settled here, and living among the English, who commonly have no particular attachment to Old England; add to this likewise that many people can never be contented with their possessions.

We sense here the changing of the town as it nears the mid-century mark, the fading away of the traces of its Dutch origins, the beginnings of its present great international position in the realm of commerce. Significant, too, are the remarks on the subject of the irksomeness of British control of

Early American Furniture

colonial activities, the first low rumbles of the coming storm.

In June of the next year (1749) we find him in Albany:

The houses in this town are very neat, and partly built with stones covered with shingles of the white pine. Some are slated with tiles from Holland because the clay of this neighborhood is not reckoned fit for tiles. . . . A great number of houses were built like those of New Brunswick which I have described, the gable-end being built towards the street, of bricks, and all the other walls of planks. The outside of the houses is never covered with lime or mortar, nor have I seen it practised in any North-American towns . . . and the walls do not seem to be damaged by the air. The gutters on the roofs reach almost to the middle of the street. This preserves the walls from being damaged by the rain; but is extremely disagreeable in rainy weather for the people in the streets, there being hardly any means of avoiding the water from the gutters. The street-doors are generally in the middle of the houses; and on both sides are seats, on which, during fair weather the people spend almost the whole day—especially those which are in the shadow of the houses. In the evening these seats are covered with people of both sexes; but this is rather troublesome, as those who pass by are obliged to greet every body, unless they will shock the politeness of the inhabitants of this town.



PLATE XXXV

A wing chair from the workshop of Duncan Phyfe, a side chair from the Elias Hasket Derby house in Salem, and an arm-chair said to be from the old State House at Hartford, the two latter under Hepplewhite influence

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

The description gives us an idea of the inland town, albeit one of importance. Even here the fashion in building is less up to date than in New York, not so far away.

Enough for the towns. On the great plantations, life went on easily and charmingly. There comes down a description of the magnificent gardens of "Crowfield," the Middleton place on Goose Creek, some miles from Charleston, South Carolina. No one who has seen them, even in their present state, can forget them. Eliza Lucas, later Mrs. Pinckney, visited and described the place shortly before the middle of the eighteenth century:

The house stands a mile from, but in sight of the road . . . as you draw near [you see] first the fruitful vine mantling the wall . . . next a spacious Basin in the midst of a large Green presents itself as you enter the gate which leads to the House wch is neatly finished, the rooms well contrived and elegantly furnished. From the back door is a spacious walk a thousand feet long, each side of which nearest the house is a grass plat ornamented in a Serpentine manner with Flowers; next to that on the right hand . . . a thicket of young, tall live oaks where a variety of airey choristers pour fourth their melody. . . . Opposite on the left hand is a large square boling green, set a little below the level of the rest of the garden with a walk quite round

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composed of a double row of fine large flowering Laurel and Catalpas which afford shade. My letter will be of an unreasonable length if I don't pass over the Mounts, wilderness, etc., and come to the bottom of this charming spot where is a large fish pond with a mount rising out of the middle the top of wch is level with the dwelling house, and upon it is a roman temple, on each side of this are other large fish ponds properly disposed which form a fine Prospect of water from the house.

A European landscape architect is said to have laid out these magnificent gardens, probably the most elaborate of their day in America. The houses of Charleston itself were very fine indeed, many of them standing to-day in that charming city which carries its old traditions with more distinction than most American towns. Great wealth was centered here, great culture and spirit, and its constant communication with other lands and other colonies gave it a cosmopolitan air. Many of its fine possessions were brought from England, particularly furniture, silver, and ceramics. Nowhere can one better gain the impression of what an eighteenth-century colonial town was like than in this lovely spot between the rivers Ashley and Cooper. Josiah Quincy, Jr., gives us a glimpse of Miles Brewton's hospitality

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

in 1773 in that magnificent house still standing in beautiful preservation:

Dined with a large company at Miles Brewton's Esq., a gentleman of very large fortune; a superb house, said to have cost him £8000 sterling. Politics started before dinner. . . . A most elegant table, three courses, &c. &c. At Mr. Brewton's side-board was very magnificent plate. A very fine bird kept familiarly playing about the room under our chairs and the table picking up the crumbs and perching on the window and sideboard.

In addition to the desire for homes commensurate with his means and expressive of his tastes, which the colonial aristocrat took from England, we find him at this time encouraging the fine arts and the humbler crafts. John Smith of Philadelphia, an important merchant, tells us, "Sam Powel and I with some trouble bound out Seymour Wood apprentice to Francis Trumble to learn the joiner and chairmakers Trades." Powel, too, is supposed to have enabled Benjamin West to go abroad to continue his study of painting.

A little later on, in January, 1775, when the clouds of war were gathering between the two countries, we find Josiah Quincy, Jr., traveling in Eng-

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land pursuant of the colonial gentleman's thirst for a first-hand knowledge of the home country. His observations are keen and interesting and his contact with people of note surprising. He writes, January 2, 1775:

Went again over Bath in order to review the buildings. Spent the afternoon in very improving conversation with Mrs. Macaulay, and went in the evening to a ball at the new Rooms, which was full and very splendid. The Rooms are very elegant, and the paintings which cover the windows, taken from the draughts of the figures found at the ruins of Herculaneum, have a fine effect. . . . Col. Barré, while we were viewing the pictures taken from the ruins at Herculaneum said, "I hope you have not the books containing the draughts of those ruins with you." I replied, there was one set, I believe, in the public library at our college. "Keep them there," he said, "and they may be of some service as a matter of curiosity for the speculative; but let them get abroad, and you are ruined. They will infuse a taste for buildings and sculpture and when a people get a taste for fine arts, they are ruined."

Quincy's remarks on the Herculaneum designs are interesting in view of the change in taste which they herald, a change which in this country was delayed for many years by the interruption of war.

Not only were the houses of the well-to-do fur-

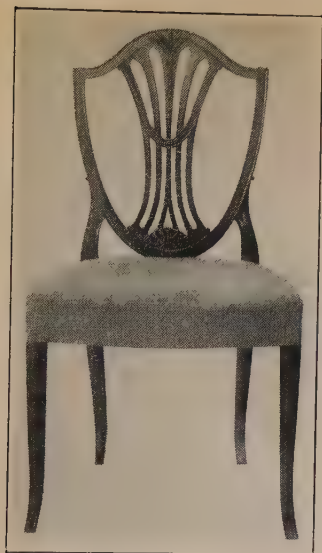


PLATE XXXVI

Three types of shield-backs confessing Hepplewhite influence, ornamented with carving and inlay

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

nished with things in the latest mode but their minds were engaged with the study of the past and of the present, to judge by the libraries which they often possessed. Of books on architecture and the arts, a very rich list is included in the great library of Colonel William Byrd, collected chiefly by William Byrd II. A catalogue was made,—evidently by a person not well acquainted with books,—probably in 1777, just before the library was sold. A printed advertisement in the “Virginia Gazette” for December 19, 1777, says “near four thousand volumes . . . contained in twenty three double presses of black Walnut . . . and also capital Engravings. Great part of the Books in elegant Bindings, and of the best editions and a considerable number of them very scarce.” The catalogue lists

Camden’s *Britannia*, *Polygraphia* by Salmon (2 vols.), *Art of Glass*, Richard’s *Palladio*, *Description de Versailles*, *Architecture di Scamozzi*, *The Art of Sound Building*, *Vitruvius Britannicus* (3 vols.), *Palladio’s Architecture*, *Alberti’s Architecture* (2 vols.), *Principes L’Architecture*, *Traite d’Architecture*, *Art of Metals*, *Palladio’s Architecture*, *Practical Architecture*, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, *Wells Ancient and Modern Maps*, *Two large books of Maps*, *New General Atlas*.

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Under the heading "Views" we find, "Versailles, Maisons de France, Pallazzidi Roma, Segment Marmor Romanorum, Tableau de Cabin du Roy, Festiva ad Capita Annulemque Decursio."

One of the most interesting wills of the time, both in the detail of its provisions and in the quantity and value of its bequests, is that of Mrs. James Alexander, which is dated 1756. Mrs. Alexander died in 1760. This will has been published in that excellent book by Miss Esther Singleton "Social New York Under the Georges," but it will not at all detract from its interest to present it again in the light of more recent knowledge:

In the name of God Amen I Mary Alexander of the City of New York, Widow of James Alexander late of the Same City—Esqr. deceased . . . give devise and bequeath unto my Eldest Son John Provoost of this City Merchant the sum of five thousand pounds current Money of the Colony of New York. . . . I also give unto my late Son David's picture which Hangs in the great Room above Stairs, Item I give devise and bequeath unto my Son William Alexander. . . . All that my Dwelling House with the outhouse ground Stables and Appurtenances belonging thereto and now in my possession . . . I give to my said son William Alexander my largest and best carpet as also his Fathers and my picture. Item I give to my eldest

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

Daughter Mary Livingston the Wife of Peter Van Brugh Livingston of this City Merchant all my Wearing apparel whatsoever as Linnen Woollen Silk Gold Jewels of all kinds worne by me none excepted as also my Chaise called the Boston Chaise and the horse I have and keep at Pasture. Item I give to my daughter Elizabeth the wife of John Stevens of New Jersey Merchant the sum of One hundred pounds and New York Currency to purchase Furniture for a Bed. Item I give devise and bequeath unto my Daughter Catherine Parker One Dozen and four Crimson Damask Chairs the Crimson Damask Window Curtains the looking Glass the Marble Table that now are in the Dining Room the Square Tea Table with the China thereon in the Blue and Gold Leather Room as also the One half of all the China and glass in all the Closets the Mahogany Dining Table the next in size to the largest the Mahogany Clothes Chest as also my Wench called Venus and her two children Clarinda and Bristoll. I also give unto her my long Silver Salver a Silver Tea Kettle and Lamp the Chints Bed in the large back room with the Feather Bed Bolster Pillows Bedstead and Furniture belonging thereto my third best Carpett and all my pictures not herein given to my other children I also give to her the sum of One Hundred pounds New York currency to buy Furniture for a bed Item I give . . . to my youngest Daughter Susannah the Sum of Fifteen hundred pounds Current money aforesaid. . . . I also give unto her the two large looking Glasses and the two Marble Tables which are placed and stand under them the Eighteen Chairs with Green Bottoms and the Green Win-

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dow Curtains all which are in the Great Tapestry Room above Stairs. I also give unto her the three Sconces Suiting the above mentioned Glasses and the twelve chairs with green bottoms which are in the little Front parlour below Stairs, also the looking Glass and Pictures that hang in the Old Parlour below, the Green Russell Bed and Window Curtains, the Green Silk bed quilt two Blankets one Rugg the Feather Bed two Pillows Boulster and Bed Stead belonging thereto I also give her the chints Bed which stands in the little Back Room with the Bed Stead Feather Bed two Blankets One Rugg One Quilt two pillows and One Boulster the large Holland Cupboard the Dressing Table and Dressing Glass twelve Chairs with yellow Bottoms the five pair of Window Curtains the Square Tea Table with the White China upon it which are in the Room Hung with Blew and Gilt Leather my large Mahogany Table and three small mahogany tables my second best Carpett One set of Blue and White China Dishes and plates for a Table also a Tureen Eighteen pair of Sheets Eighteen pair of Pillow Cases two dozen Table Cloths Three Dozen Napkins two dozen of Pewter Dishes five Dozen Pewter plates four of my best Kettles four of my best iron pots four Sauce Pans four pair of AndIrons four pair of Tongs and Shovels two Dozen of Ivory Handled Knives and two Dozen of Forks also the other half part of all the China and Glass in all the Closets of the House I live in I also give unto her the following pieces of Wrought Plate that is to say my best Silver Salt Sellers two Sauce Cups One Dozen of Table Spoons One Silver Bowl two Silver Tea Can-



PLATE XXXVII

Four Sheraton-type chairs, the upper right inlaid with Greek honeysuckle: the lower right painted black, with flowers and wheat in colors

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

nisters One Sugar Box One Milk Pott One Dozen Tea Spoons and a Tea Tongs One Silver Tea Kettle and Chafing Dish two Small Salvers belonging to the Tea Table Furniture as also my Silver Salver next to the Largest I also give unto her my negro Wench called Phillis and her Son called London also my Negro Man called Sharp I also give unto her all other Such Necessary Furniture for Housekeeping as will with what I have before mentioned be equal to what I have given to any of her Sisters Item my best Horse and Chaise I give to my Daughters Catherine and Susannah equally as Tenants in Common Item all other Sheeting and Table Linnen not before given to my Daughter Susannah I give devise and bequeath unto and among my four Daughters to wit Mary Livingston Elizabeth Stevens Catherine Parker and Susannah Alexander equally to be shared and divided between them Item all other my Wrought Plate not before particularly given to my Daughters Catherine and Susannah I do give . . . as follows to wit one Sixth part . . . to my son John Provoost One other sixth part . . . to my Daughter Mary Livingston One other Sixth part . . . to my Son William Alexander One other sixth part . . . to my Daughter Elizabeth Stevens One other Sixth part to Catherine Parker and the other remaining sixth part to Susannah. . . .

For a farewell view as we leave the period, we can do no better than to look in on the family life of Colonel Robert Carter of Nomini Hall in West-

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moreland County, Virginia. Philip Fithian presents this picture in his diary during his residence as tutor to the young sons of Colonel Carter. We shall take these excerpts out of order of their writing, that they may present first a description of the place.

March 18, 1774.

Mr. Carter now possesses 60,000 Acres of Land, & about 600 Negroes. His Estate is much divided & lies in almost every county in this Colony. He has lands in the Neighborhood of Williamsburg, & an elegant & Spacious House in that City. He owns a great part of the well known Iron-works near Baltimore in Maryland. And he has one or more considerable Farms not far from Anopolis. . . . Out of these Lands . . . Mr. Carter has chosen for the place of his habitation a high spot of Ground in Westmoreland County at the Head of the Navigation of the River Nomini, where he has erected a large Elegant House, at a vast expense—Nomini Hall. This house is built with Brick, but the bricks have been covered with strong lime Mortar; so that the building is now perfectly white; it is seventy-six Feet long from East to West; & forty-four wide from North to South. . . . There are four Rooms on a Floor disposed of in the following manner. Below is a dining Room where we usually sit; the second is a dining Room for the children; the third is Mr. Carter's study; & the fourth is a Ball-Room thirty feet long—above stairs, one

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

Room is for Mr. & Mrs. Carter; the second for the young Ladies; & the other two for occasional Company. As this House is large, & stands on a high piece of Land it may be seen considerable distance: I have seen it at a distance of six miles. At equal Distances from each corner of this Building stand four other considerable Houses. First at the North East corner & at 100 yards Distance stands the School House; at the North-West corner & at the same Distance stands the stable; at the South-West Corner . . . the Coach-House . . . at the South East Corner stands the Work-House [an interesting example of symmetrical arrangement of main house and detached outhouses, typical of the great plantations of the south]. . . . First the School-House has five well-finished convenient Rooms. . . . In each Room is a fire; in the large Room below-Stairs we keep our School: the other two Rooms below which are smaller are allowed to Mr. Randolph the Clerk. The Room above the School-Room Ben and I live in; & the other Room above Stairs belongs to Harry and Bob, each one has a bed to himself. And we are all called by the Bell to the Great-House for Breakfast. . . . From the front Yard of the Great House, to the Wash-House is a curious Terrace covered finely with green turf & about five foot high with a slope of eight feet, which appears exceedingly well to persons coming to the front of the House. . . . This terrace is produced along the Front of the House . . . but before the Front-Doors is a broad flight of steps. . . . Due East of the Great House are two Rows of tall, flourishing, beautiful Poplars . . . at the Easternmost end of which

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is the great Road leading through Westmoreland to Richmond. . . . The Area of the Triangle made by the Wash-House, Stable and School-House is perfectly level & designed for a bowling-green laid out in rectangular Walks which are paved with brick & covered over with Burnt Oyster-Shells. In the other triangle made by the Wash House, Stable and Coach, is the Kitchen, a well built house as large as the School House, Bake-House, Store House & several other small Houses, all which stand due West & at a small distance from the Great House and form a little handsome Street. These Buildings stand about a quarter of a mile from a Fork of the River Nomini, one Branch of which runs on the East of us, on which are two Mills; one of them belongs to Mr. Turburville the other to Mr. Washington . . . another branch of the River runs to the West of us, on which and at a small distance above the House stands Mr. Carter's Merchant Mill . . . to go to the Mill from the House we descend about 100 feet; the Dam is so broad that two Carriages may pass conveniently on it; & the Pond from twelve to eighteen Foot water—at the fork Mr. Carter has a Granery where he lands his Wheat for the Mill, Iron from the Works, etc.

Monday, December 13, 1773.

Mr. Carter is practising this evening on the Guittar. He begins with the Trumpet Minuet. He has a good ear for Music; a vastly delicate Taste and keeps good Instruments, he has here at Home a Harpsichord, Forte-Piano, Harmonica, Guittar & German Flutes & at Williamsburg,

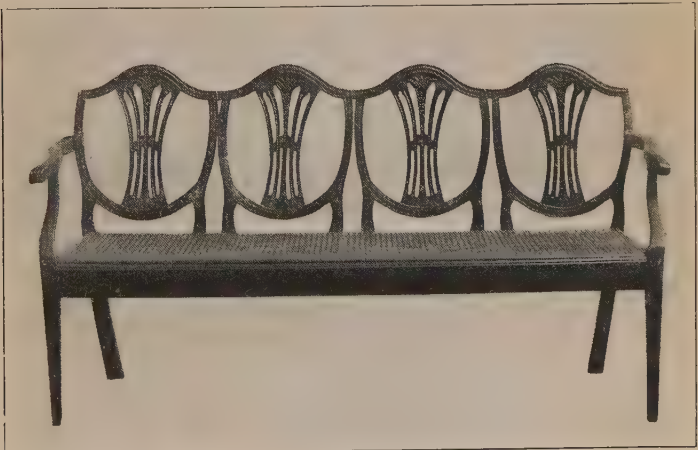


PLATE XXXVIII

Two settees, the upper with painted decoration in color on black; the lower made up of shield chair-backs with carving, in mahogany

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

has a good Organ, he himself is indefatigable in the Practice.

January 2, 1774.

Mr. Carter has a Cart & three pair of Oxen which every Day bring in four Loads of Wood, Sunday excepted, & yet these very severe Days we have none to spare; And indeed I do not wonder, for in the Great House, School House, Kitchen, &c., there are twenty-Eight steady fires! & most of these are very Large.

June 11, 1774.

I was setting in the Colonel's Library. I took a Catalogue of the whole of His Books . . . & he tells me he has left behind him at Williamsburg, with many other things 458 Volumes, besides music and Pamphlets. 89 vols. folio, 79 quarto, 375 octavo, 502 duodecimo, 458 Williamsburg library (in all) 1503.

Echoes come to this remote manor-house of the troublesome times in the North. Politics and the relation to the mother country are discussed at meals. One of these conversations shows the feeling which now held the more thinking colonists in its grip.

Thursday, September 16, 1774.

Dined with us Captain Walker. He threw out several exceedingly unpopular Sentiments with regard to the present amazing Disturbances through the Colonies. . . . One in

Early American Furniture

special I think proper to record because it fixes his Character and declares him, in spite of all pretence, an enemy to America. . . . He asserted that no officers (at Boston, or elsewhere) are obliged, either by Law or Right to question or refuse any kind of orders which they receive from their Sovereign or commanding officer. . . . But I account every man, who possesses and publishes such sentiments in this Crisis of the Fate of a vast Empire, as great an enemy to America at least, as Milton's Arch-Devil was to Mankind!

Thursday, February 10, 1774.

We had the Virginia Gazette today in which the accounts concerning the destroying the Tea at Boston are confirmed —& also an account of the Burning the House of Governor Tryon. Dined with us Colonel Frank Lee: his Wife and Captain John Lee. Toasts after Dinner, the King, Queen, Absent Friends, Governor of Virginia, & his Lady just arrived, & Success to American Trade and Commerce.

They are still toasting the king and queen, the royal governor, and his lady, but ending up with "Success to American Trade and Commerce." This feeling intensifies and resentment against the Government grows.

September 26, 1774.

Something in our palace this Evening, very merry happened—Mrs. Carter made a dish of Tea. At Coffee she

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

sent me a dish—& the Colonel both ignorant—He smelt, sipt—look'd—at last with great gravity he asks what's this?—Do you ask Sir!—Poh!—and out he throws it splash a sacrifice to Vulcan.

On May 29, 1774, he records: "Drank coffee at four, they are now too patriotic to use tea." The Boston Tea Party strikes its responsive chords in Virginia.

And thus the period ends with war—war more nearly akin to civil war than to revolution. Two groups of English-speaking men were ranged against each other, one loyal until forced by the other to revolt. The civilization which each owned was common to both, the traditions behind them were the same. And each in many ways had expressed that civilization in similar terms, enjoyed much the same surroundings of daily life. In the twenty or thirty years before this war the colonists had come closer to being a replica of the homeland than they ever had before, closer than the United States has ever succeeded in coming since.

THE FURNITURE

We come now to the culminating period in the history of our furniture, when the myriad different

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suggestions which have been accumulating and have been tested through several years are brought into play. Along with this enormous supply of ideas in furniture design, we have a large group of consummate craftsmen to put them into concrete form, and a critical buying public to encourage these craftsmen with generous patronage. The social customs of the day assisted in calling forth all of the ingenuity of the cabinet-makers, who brought out new and clever forms of furniture to serve special purposes.

The society in France and England, which dominated the taste of the period, was sophisticated and fashionable. An aristocracy of wealth spent all of its waking hours in devising new ways for giving itself pleasure. New suggestions which possessed the freshness of the unusual appealed to these people, blasé with the enjoyment of their elaborate life. France was the leader of the world in things fashionable, and the influence of that great lady Pompadour has often been underestimated in its effect upon the arts. England took from France what she wished of the dazzling store of artistic fashions, and in adapting these to her own life through the hands of her own artists created a su-

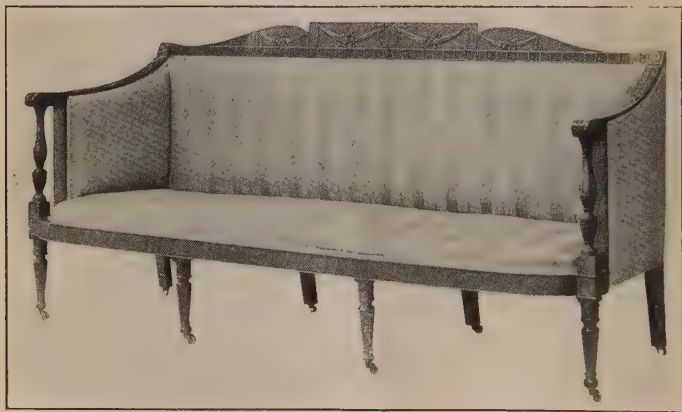


PLATE XXXIX

Two Salem sofas, attributed to Samuel McIntire, the upper one from the Elias Hasket Derby house, of which McIntire was architect

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

perbly national style of furniture. America in her turn, aiming to be at least as English as the English, took from the mother country what seemed to be adaptable to her own needs.

This process of adaptation in both countries produced works which bear the stamp of national taste, at the same time confessing their debt to the intellectual designing of the great French makers of the day. Perhaps never before or since has the association of so many artists of the first rank been related to the production of work of purely decorative art, as in France of this period.

The basis of the design of the period is that development of the baroque school somewhat erroneously called the rococo, or, as it has been named in France, *rocaille*. The elaborate baroque work of the seventeenth century dominated by the officialdom of Louis XIV, with all its gorgeousness, preserved a cold symmetry of arrangement and a formal skeleton of conventional architectural form. Presided over by such classically trained artists as Le Brun, Mansart, and Le Notre, who aimed to please the somewhat unimaginative taste of the king, its fancifulness was its least outstanding quality. We see its reflection in the late seventeenth and early

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eighteenth century work in England and America. A change from this, working almost a revulsion of taste in the second quarter of the century, gave opportunity to the lighter handed and more imaginative artists, who had been held heretofore in restraint, to go the limit of their desire.

The outstanding characteristic of the new school was the employment in extenso of the curved line, the shunning of the straight line wherever possible. The architectural lines of interior woodwork and the structural members of furniture all used the simple C scrolls conjoined in different relations, or the elongated S scroll alone or in association with the C.

The ornamentation of this combination of curves was made up of natural forms, naturalistically treated. Modeled ornament, chiefly carved, followed the flowing curves of the structure. Leaves and flowers of many sorts, of exotic or imaginary origin, details formalizing the natural shapes of rocks and shells, animal and bird feet were all mingled with architectural detail and molding to create an impression of richness and complexity.

In England this period has been called the age of cabinet-makers. The more ambitious furniture-

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

makers of the day published volumes of plates showing all kinds of furniture which they made or could make. These books, coming into the hands both of the buying public and of other craftsmen, led to an homogeneity of taste while emphasizing the possibility of great variety in the work.

The name of one great cabinet-maker has been associated with the best English and American work of this period, although he was only one of several important and popular designer-craftsmen of the time. By reason both of his patronage by the great, and through the production of a book on the elaborate furniture in which he worked, Thomas Chippendale stands out as the most typical figure of his time in the cabinet-maker's world. His volume of plates and text, "The Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director," was first published in 1754 and reissued in several editions. Here were shown every sort and kind of luxurious or amusing piece of furniture, with unlimited varieties of decorative treatment. Other designers, such as Manwaring, specialized more or less in chairs and also published books of design.

It is scarcely precise to give to this period the name of one man, since he and many others were working in the mode which, although it was fash-

Early American Furniture

ionable, was only an expression of the prevailing state of the artistic tradition of the western world at that time. A similar style is found in Spain and Portugal, in Flanders and Germany, but in each nation is impressed with the peculiar stamp of that nation's tastes and preferences. It is so with the American expression, where the social uses called for less elaborate settings than abroad, and where the preference for certain types led to their development and the neglect of others more popular in England. At the same time the desire in Colonial England was to be as much as possible like old England, and for this reason the American furniture of the period, while often reaching a point of excellence which in this country has never been exceeded, is less characteristically American than that made at certain other times.

Let us look at this furniture and see how its development from the beginnings in the period of transition led to the ultimate elaboration of the earlier Georgian forms.

The wood employed for most of the fine furniture is now mahogany rather than walnut. Simple pieces continue to be made of less precious woods, such as maple and cherry.



PLATE XL

Salem arm-chair and two Sheraton chests of drawers veneered
with satinwood

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

We saw in those last forms of the transition the first introduction of the structural curve, the cabriole leg being perhaps the most important single element. Since the chairs, throughout the eighteenth century, are the most accurate reflections of changes in style, we shall look at these first.

The earlier type which we have seen ending the period of transition had the solid splat set in the back, cut out to violin or vase form, the dipped curve of the cresting flowing without break into the curving lines of the back posts, the whole back modeled into a scooped-out shape or spoon curve. The cabriole legs supported a seat sometimes angular, sometimes curved, in plan. Very little carving appears and that is simple, on the knees of the cabriole, on the center of the cresting, and occasionally on the violin splat.

The most outstanding innovation of the so-called Chippendale school was the cutting out of the solid splat into an openwork design, ajouré, which gave opportunity for more varied and beautiful treatments. (Plate XVIII). The second innovation was the change in the shape of the cresting. Where this before had curved up from a low center, then down into the back posts, we now have a cresting

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shaped like a cupid's bow, turned up at the ends and set upon the posts, whose full curved line is stiffened into a very slight curve (Plate XXVI).

To counterbalance the more elaborate carved ornament and openwork cutting of the back, straight lines or slightly curved ones are used in the seat instead of the earlier horseshoe form.

We now have a virtually new chair, which will be varied, elaborated, simplified, and arranged with many permutations and combinations of parts, its ornament calling upon all of the eclectic suggestions of a period to whose taste that adjective may well be applied.

Chairs were of very many varieties, with backs both wooden and upholstered, wooden or upholstered arms. The arm-chairs were of different sizes, some like the French fauteuils, some large, roomy wing chairs. Another sort of leg, straight and molded, alternated with the cabriole in popularity, a reflection of the Chinese influence, which gave contrast to the curves of the back seat, or arms. The cabriole legs and straight legs are found on the big wing chairs, as well as on the smaller side chairs and chaise-longues.

The fashion to make up sets of chairs to match

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

continued. All the chairs for a dining-room would have the same design adapted in both arm and side forms, while tables might match in the detail of legs and feet.

One of the most distinguishing marks of the American wooden-backed side chair of this period is the structural one of the side seat-rails morticing through the back post. The end of the tenon of the side rail is visible on the back post. This was a very practical method of joinery, since in the inevitable loosening of the joints, a tiny wedge driven into the space beside or above the tenon would strengthen it effectively. A good many of the American straight-legged side chairs were braced with stretchers, which were not, however, much used with the cabriole leg except in the large arm-chairs.

There is a good deal of variety in the decoration of the chairs, particularly of the open-splat type. The eclectic taste of the day resulted in the employment of motifs taken from Renaissance, Gothic, Chinese, and French ornament. Splats were made up of Gothic and Chinese fretwork or of interlacing straps in pleasing patterns, with carvings of acanthus leaves, ribbons, cords and tassels. The leaf form, based more or less on the acanthus, fitted well into

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the sinuous curves. A delicate bead molding often surrounded a field on which the modeled ornament showed. The ends of the bow-shaped cresting may turn back on themselves in a sort of tight volute. The edges of chair seat-rails were usually molded on the upper edge, the lower edge plain or in more elaborate examples cut out to a curved silhouette and carved with a bead molding and leaves.

The foot of the cabriole leg, as well as the knee, was carved. The claw-and-ball foot is found on the latest transitional pieces, the animal and bird claw being realistically reproduced, the cabrioles virtually always in this period having the claw and ball foot. The knee of the cabriole, and the triangular block which ties it into the seat-rail, are carved with leaves, variations of the acanthus, which follow the contour of the block and the curve of the knee (Fig. 11).

All of this carving is plastic in the extreme, softly modeled and flowing, adapting itself to the predominating lines of the piece. It is placed less with the idea of emphasizing structure than of harmonizing the rather subtle combinations of curves in the piece as a whole.

The upholstery of the time, not only upon the

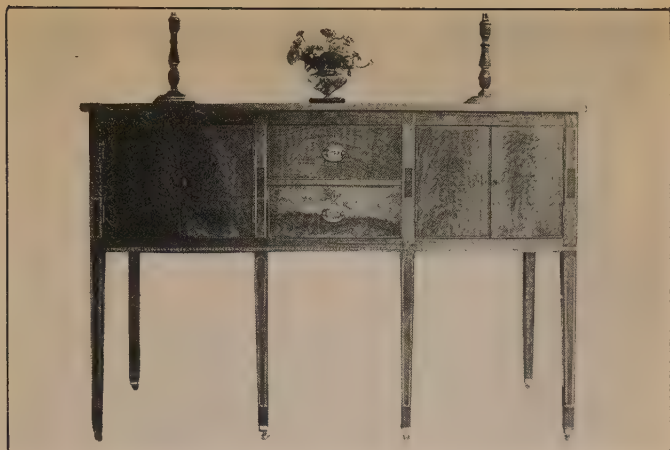


PLATE XLI

Two sideboards of Sheraton style

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

furniture itself but for curtains and wall-coverings, was of colored damask, velvet, or linen. Some upholstered chairs and sofas were finished at the edge and over the back with a row of brass-headed tacks; other chairs had the slip seat, which was set into the seat-rails.

So much for chairs, which have the largest variety of form and decoration. The other early furniture forms—tables, chests, desks, and stools—all receive treatments in the feeling of the style.

The chest, which now has wholly assumed the guise of the high-boy, the chest of drawers, and the chest-on-chest, is an important form of the period. The high-boy, with its matching low-boy, was especially popular in America, not found to any great extent in England. With cabriole legs and a top with scrolled pediment, it is an essentially distinguished piece. There are simple ones with little or no ornament excepting moldings and a molded cornice. The other extreme is seen in the magnificent high-boys made in Philadelphia with legs, lower central drawer, and apron carved, with fretwork about the waist, denticulated cornice, a scrolled pediment with carved leaves at the volutes, and delicate urns or other finials at the corners. In

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the center of the scrolled pediment some elaborate motif occurs—an urn with a flame, a bust, or a bit of ajouré rocaille detail. The wood used in these finer high-boys is carefully chosen, the drawer fronts all cut from the same log of mahogany wood. Their corners are finished with a quarter column, the drawers edged with a tiny thumb-nail molding (Plate XXVIII).

There are, of course, the simpler examples, some of which are essentially finer than the more elaborate examples by reason of their delicacy of proportion. The decoration in these begins with the cornice and scrolled pediment, where dentils or a fine series of moldings are used. The small drawer which usually occurs in the upper central part, and at the center of the bottom, is carved with a shell or with a shell flanked by scrolls or leaves (Plate XXXII). In some a fan or a half-shell forms the only ornament, in others there is no carved ornament at all. The latter is the more usual type in New England.

The low-boys, narrower and lower than the lower part of the high-boys, follow in design and decoration the same form. The skirting has the same silhouette, the legs are similar and the corners have

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treatments like those of the high-boys, squared or set with quarter-colonettes.

Another fine form of the period is the chest-on-chest; that is, a chest of drawers supporting an upper carcass like the upper part of the high-boy. In this the treatment resembles the high-boy, the

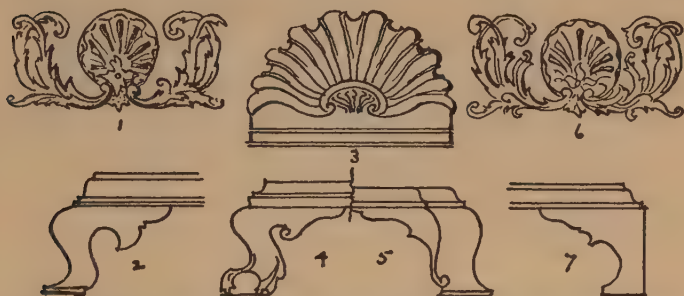


FIGURE 10—Decoration and detail found on the mahogany furniture showing Chippendale influence. Four kinds of bracket feet, three of them dwarf cabriole

corners of the upper portion occasionally flanked by pilasters. The cornice may or may not be topped by a pediment—broken or scrolled. The lower portion is usually very simple, and rests upon dwarf-cabriole or bracket feet.

The bracket foot is a characteristic of the period. It may be a short, straight bracket or one slightly curved. Its treatment in relation to the base mold-

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ings of the piece above it, gives opportunity for careful study (Fig. 10).

A certain group of furniture may be mentioned here as exhibiting the finest treatment of the bracket foot, as well as another element in the appropriate decoration of the furniture built in the so-called Chippendale mode. A cabinet-maker named John Goddard worked in Newport, Rhode Island, in the third quarter of the century. His finest pieces are characterized by the use of the block front (Fig. 10 and Plate XXXI). This is a breaking up of the front surface of case furniture with a central sunken panel flanked by surfaces of equal width, raised slightly. In Goddard's best pieces, the blocking and sinking terminate at the top in shells of a particular design, which the illustrations will explain better than any description. (Their center is a formalized sheaf of wheat.) Other treatments of the shell block front are found in Connecticut, executed often in cherry. The bottom is scrolled and molded with a delicate bead molding which runs onto the bracket foot. Less elaborately designed pieces of block-front type were made in other parts of New England.

Goddard's treatment of the bracket foot is com-

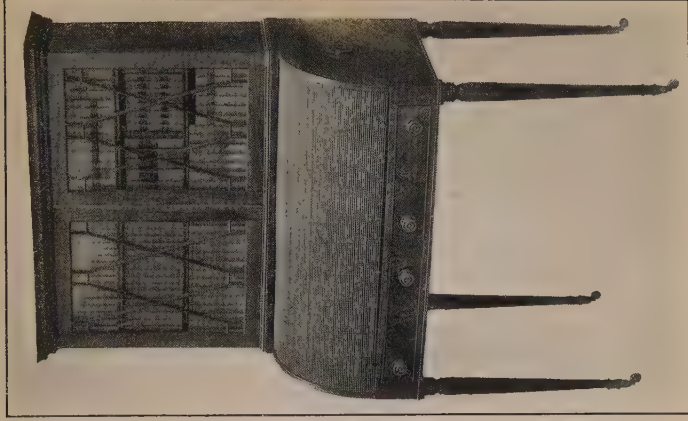
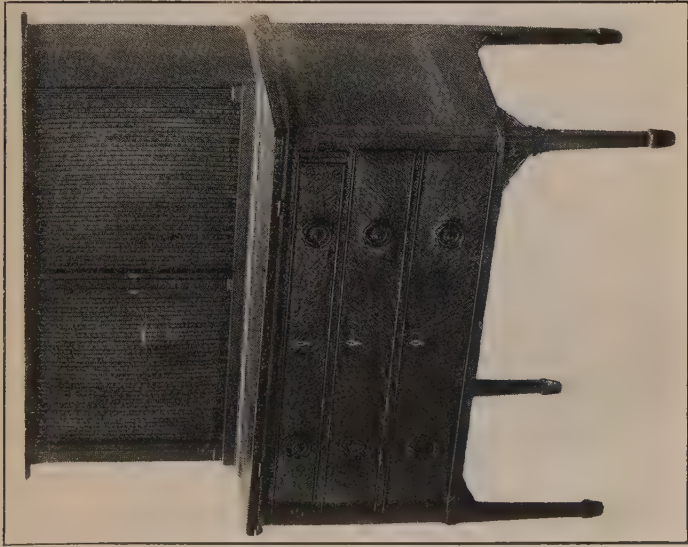


PLATE XLII

Tambour desk of satinwood, with label of Seymour of Boston, and Sheraton roll-top
secretary of New England provenance

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

plete. The slight line of the blocking carries down through the base moldings onto the foot, whose inside edge is molded and elaborated with a tiny scroll (Fig. 10, No. 5). This Goddard furniture is probably the finest American furniture of the period, in the intrinsic qualities of appropriate use of material and simplicity and honesty of design. Goddard's block-front treatment is applied to chests of drawers, knee-hole desks, and secretaries. A similar treatment of shell block front is seen applied to clocks and to high-boys, although rather unsuccessfully in the latter case.

The desks of the period are of four types. We have the slant-top desk raised on cabriole legs, with one drawer below the desk portion, the slant-top on dwarf cabriole feet, with several drawers, the flat-top, knee-hole desk, and the secretary with an upper carcass above the slant top, fitted with doors.

The high-legged cabriole desk is not a usual form, although a thoroughly practical one. Such examples as exist are rather simple affairs, with little or no decoration. The more usual type—in fact, one of the most usual pieces of the period—is that with four drawers below the slant top, resting on dwarf cabriole or bracket feet. It, too, is usually

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rather plain, sometimes of beautiful wood (mahogany, maple, or cherry), with its chief decorative treatment reserved for the interior. The interior of the desk proper is often handsomely designed. In general a small compartment is in the center, closed by a door which may be carved or paneled.



FIGURE II—Cabriole legs with ball-and-claw feet and other details found on the furniture of the middle of the eighteenth century

This is flanked with tiny pilasters, or half-columns, which make tall, narrow drawers. At each side of this central motif are pigeonholes, with drawers above or below, or both, in any number of arrangements.

The slant tops of the old desks are nearly all framed in the same manner—a broad central piece, strengthened at the ends with narrower pieces whose grain runs at right angles to the other, and at the

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upper edge another narrow piece which miters into the end pieces.

The all-pervasive curve of the period affects the form as well as the decoration of some of this case furniture. Somewhat like the regular block-front motif is the serpentine. This may be made up of a central sunken portion flanked by raised side blocks, the whole forming one wavy curve. It is in a way simply the block front all softened together, the tops of the blocks and sinkages dying softly into the vertical surface. Another and simpler serpentine front is like this, but with no suggestion of the block, the top following the same plan as the bottom. In both of these the main surface still remains vertical. The other important treatment affects the vertical surface and gives us the bombé, or kettle shape, in which the vertical surface follows a graceful S curve. This is a form which originated in France of the eighteenth century. These various treatments of the carcass of case furniture are combined endlessly with the other characteristic details of straight or scrolled pediments, bracket feet, curved or straight, and dwarf cabriole.

Tables are of all sorts, to suit the customs of the day—drop-leaf tables, single or in sets of two or

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three for dining-boards; tea or occasional tables with small drop leaves; tea-tables with four legs or with tripod bases; kettle-stands, candle-stands, and card tables with hinged flap.

The large tables have usually the plain cabriole with ball-and-claw feet, the skirtings plain or cut to a silhouette of conjoined curves. They have gate legs to support the flaps when raised, and are rectangular, round, or oval. Long dining-tables have a central section which is rectangular, with end sections which are rounded.

Smaller tables are of the same sort, or may be rectangular with tray tops without drop leaves. The circular, tripod form, which we saw in the preceding period, is elaborated here with handsome decoration. The tops are frequently scalloped and edged with a molding or rocaille ornament cut from the solid wood. The pedestal is made up of turned colonette or baluster, handsomely carved, supported upon cabriole legs carved at knee and foot.

The simpler forms have plain turned balusters and plain cabrioles with ball-and-claw feet. The tops may be entirely plain or be edged with a molding.

One of the most popular tables, and one of much



PLATE XLIII

(Above) Sideboard attributed to Duncan Phyfe, in late Sheraton style; (below) group of Sheraton-style furniture with inlaid eagle medallions

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dignity was the pier table, with or without a marble top (Plate XXII). In these the tall cabriole legs supported a skirting on which rested the top. In the finest examples this skirting was handsomely carved, as were the knees and feet of the cabriole. These tables were used in both drawing- and dining-room, in which latter case they served as sideboards, and were finished only on front and ends, to fit against the wall.

Beds at this time were less heavily draped and, permitting more of their structure to reveal itself, were treated with the detail of the period. The cabriole leg was used on foot-posts with ball-and-claw feet, posts were carved, and charmingly shaped wooden testers, carved or painted, were used. The head-boards were low and usually plain, covered up by the height of the pillows.

The sofas of this period are rare. Their general form is the so-called camel-back, whose top line is the gently flowing curve of the period. The legs are more commonly the straight molded leg joined by stretchers, more rarely the typical cabriole. The arms, with an out-swelling curve, are upholstered, as are the back and seat.

The most popular clock was the tall case clock,

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which presented a special problem in the adaptation of style. It was made up of a low base on bracket feet, a tall shaft with a door as the pendulum-case, and topped by the works-case. This glass-fronted works-case with the face was usually crowned by a scrolled pediment with corner urn finials, and central urn of wood and brass. Tiny colonettes flanked the arched glass door inclosing the face, while the corners of the long pendulum-case were treated with quarter-colonettes whose capitals and bases were often of brass. Carving occasionally was employed in the tympanum over the face (Plate XXIX), but the usual clocks were simple and carried little decoration. Some have fretwork above the pediment. They chiefly rely on the beauty of the wood for their decorative quality.

Mantel-clocks were used, but few of these were American-made, although some of the English works were undoubtedly fitted with American-made cases. They were reduced versions of the upper part of the tall clocks.

Fire-screens are charming incidental appointments. Their bases were tripod, with turned central baluster and a slim rod set into it. On this rod the frame was adjusted up and down. The frame

Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

was usually filled with needlework, although some screens had a solid board instead of a frame.

Candle-stands and kettle-stands were like the tripod tables, with changes in size to render them appropriate for use, the kettle-stands low, the candle-stands high.

Looking-glasses were very much in vogue. There was the elaborately carved ajouré frame gilded; the mahogany frame with moldings, a pediment on top, a scrolled bottom; and lighter renditions of this with top and bottom cut out to a scrolled design and veneered with handsome wood. Some of these have carved-wood appliqués, gilded, in others a gilded drop of leaves falls at each side of the frame. There is much variety in the design of these glasses, whose making was the province of a special craftsman. The scrolled pediments of the tops are set usually with a gilded bird,—eagle or pheasant,—occasionally with a rococo cartouche.

Many handsome portraits were painted and hung in the houses which were filled with this furniture. The frames of these portraits partook of the qualities of the current style and were almost the most elaborate examples of its use in America. They are made up of beautifully combined curves, foliage,

Early American Furniture

scrolled pediments reduced in scale, diaper backgrounds, and other dainty and varied ornament appropriate to the delicacy of the piece. These frames were either wholly gilded or painted in grays or other popular tones, heightened with gold on the ornament.

The mahogany which was characteristic of this period was the fine Santo Domingo variety, with

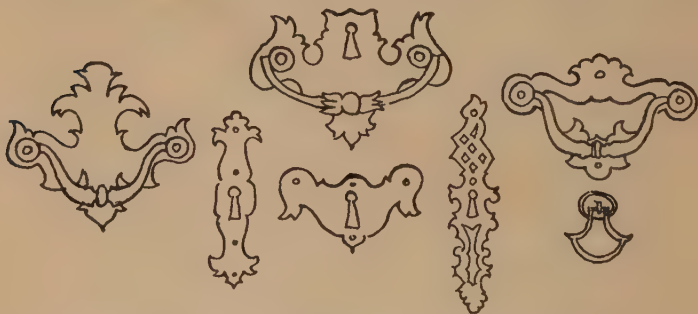


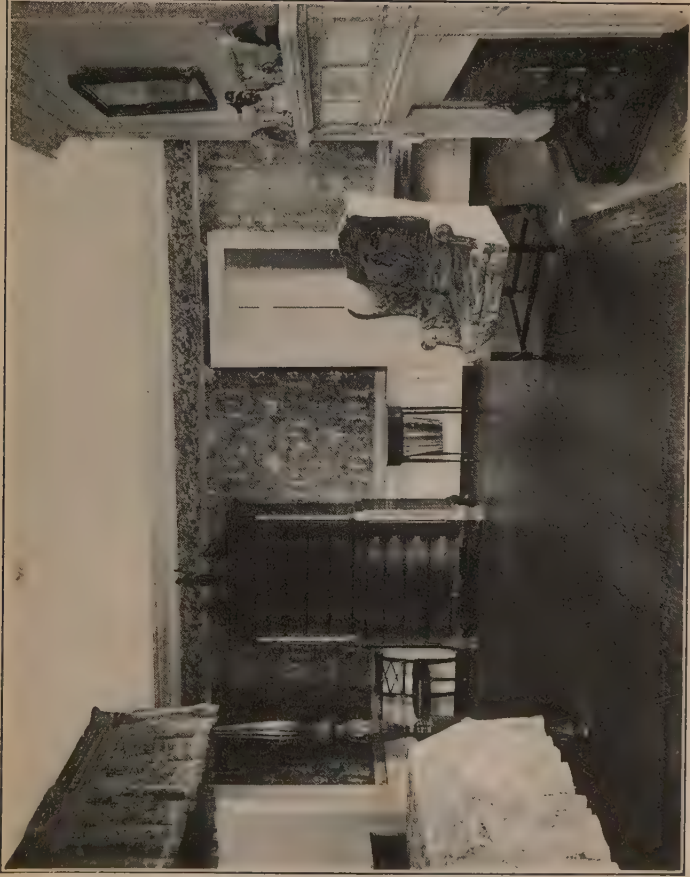
FIGURE 12—Some hardware designs of the middle of the eighteenth century

beautiful grain and depth of light. Veneers were of crotch-figured wood, which utilized planks cut from points on the tree from which the branches spring. The fine texture lent itself especially well to carving, and this method of decoration is by far the most common one. Little or no use of inlay occurs, nor veneers of light woods com-

PLATE XLIV

Bedroom with Sheraton
furniture

(The great chest-on-
chest is attributed to
McIntire of Salem)



Stylistic Attainment and Rococo Influence

bined with dark, the veneers being used to give the effect of solid boards. Occasionally touches of gold—parcel gilt—were used on the relief carving, but this is unusual. One superb high-boy in walnut retains the original ebonized and gilded moldings (Plate XXVIII). Other woods, of course, were employed for less pretentious pieces—maple, cherry, and walnut. Some of the fine Philadelphia pieces are of Virginia walnut of most handsome grain, whose use may have resulted from the difficulty of importing mahogany during the Revolutionary period.

The brasses used at this time were imported and follow the well-known "willow" pattern (Fig. 12), or, in some cases, are finely modeled bail handles of French design, or simple brass bails with plain rosettes.

The excellence of the carving around Philadelphia cannot be over-emphasized. A prime example is the charmingly executed little bust on one of the high-boys in the Metropolitan Museum, in New York. The great variety of this furniture is obvious from the illustrations. Virtually no form is lacking which is known to-day, except the side-board, for which the pier table was an adequate substitute. It was made in all designs of simplicity

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and elaboration, provincial and country renditions retaining much of the character of the style.

As the period progressed in England, it grew more and more elaborate, fanciful, and exotic in its decoration and forms, which were carried to extremes. This, too, was true of other arts associated with it, and eventually it led to repletion. Taste began to swing rapidly away from the curves which had begun to writhe, and soon a new style came along in direct antithesis which quickly superseded it. So rapidly did this change come about that the cabinet-makers—Chippendale, for instance—who had much to do with the popularity of the rococo, turned their attention to the new, less exuberant mode and worked in it with all the resources of their consummate skill.





CHAPTER V

STYLISTIC ATTAINMENT AND CLASSICAL REVIVAL

THE NEW REPUBLIC

DURING the twenty-five years which led up to the Revolution in America and through the time of its continuance, another revolution was going on abroad—a bloodless revolution in taste. The seeds for this latter had been planted farther back in the century, rooted in ancient soil, but their full growth is not evident in France and England until well along in the third quarter of the century, nor in America until virtually the last decade.

The development of the rococo school we have seen eventuating in a style of increasing elaboration. More and more involved forms and ornament, exotic and extravagant, resulted from the desire for novelty which should stimulate the jaded tastes of a blasé public. The romantic taste for the strange

Early American Furniture

and remote led to the mingling of such unhomogeneous elements as the Gothic and Chinese, conventional classic, and its more bizarre rococo descendant. This romantic taste, which in England produced Walpole's Gothic mansion of Strawberry Hill or Bickford's medieval castle as expressions of a fad, was chiefly expressed in a desire for the remote, whether of time or of place.

The changes of taste, alternating one with the other, suggest the swing of a pendulum which moves from side to side, from one extremity to another. The taste for the arts embodied in complicated elaboration of form and decoration, which had characterized the full expression of the rococo style, began to tire under a surfeit of movement and variety, just as the exuberant and extravagant life of its protagonists showed a revulsion in France by the affectation of the simple life of the peasant or the ascetic practices of the philosopher.

Providentially provided to engage the attention of the cultivated world and to afford relief from the complicated thought and over-elaborate art which was engulfing it, the discovery of the long-hidden cities of Herculaneum, (1738) and Pompeii, (1748) fired men's imagination with a desire



PLATE XLV

Fine four-poster with reeded posts and inlay on legs and rails

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

to study the arts and civilization which these ancient towns represented. The change in fashion affected men's ways of thinking, both politically and socially, as they referred back to Rome of the Republican days for models appropriate to modern use.

Earlier, as we have seen, classic influence had made itself felt, but it was possessed of a different quality. At that time it was the idea of the classic which had been the touchstone of the Renaissance, affecting profoundly the literature and philosophy, the political and social codes of the day. The result of this was seen in France and England of the late seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, and in America of the eighteenth century, in the architecture as well as in the writings of the time.

This tendency in the purely intellectual arts was given a tonic impulse by a re-revival of classical influence when the discovery of the two cities buried by Vesuvius in A.D. 79 attracted the attention of the civilized world. The enthusiasm which this novelty created—just another new idea in a period when innovations were being presented every day—grew to unusual proportions. In the succeeding pe-

Early American Furniture

riod it produced two outstanding results in America, one the outward vestige of the new government of the United States, the other the artistic expression of the Western world in the fine and utilitarian arts.

In governmental affairs, the leaders who worked out the divisions of authority for the new nation had ever before them the model of the republic on the Tiber, whose general organization was known to them through the humanistic studies of the Renaissance and succeeding research. In a somewhat immature spirit, they identified themselves with the patriots of Rome, as free men securing freedom for a people whom they had snatched from the autocracy of an oppressor. The organization of the Society of the Cincinnati, in 1783, recalled the virtue and simplicity of that ancient Roman hero Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, whose simple living and high thinking were a byword, and whose calling from the quiet pursuits of agriculture to the dictatorship of Rome was associated with the experience of Washington.

The division of the departments of government into executive, legislative, and judicial found a classic inspiration, modified by the English interpreta-

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tion of the usage of Roman Law. The nomenclature adopted and still existing and the Latin phraseology of formal mottos recall the state of mind of these architects of government. The meeting-place for the legislative branches of the Government took the Roman title of Capitol. The upper legislative house was called the Senate, with its suggestion of noble Roman forensic practice.

With all of this carrying out of the contemporary idea of classic ways there was the corresponding opportunity for artistic expression. The governmental buildings followed the classic form and evolved a style which is frequently associated with governmental architecture. Insignia of Roman authority, such as the fascis, were liberally employed in ornament, while in sculpture the great men of the day were shamelessly draped with Roman togas. It was often superficial, this imitation of the antique, but at the same time there lay behind it a profundity of basic idea, a new assertion of the rights of free men to rule themselves in a republic of their own construction.

In the realm of the arts, the new enthusiasm for the classic grew with remarkable speed in Europe. Mme. de Pompadour in 1749 sent her young

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brother, the Marquis de Vandières, to study for three years the arts of Italy in company with the architect Soufflot and the artist Cochin, in preparation for a post of high authority, that of *Surintendant des Beaux Arts* to Louis XV. These eminent persons, as well as many others, returned from the South or from Greece imbued with the spirit of the classic forms and usages. From that time on, a new style was predicated, although in France it was some time before it really predominated over that in which older architects and *ébénistes* were practised.

In England some introduction of the new classic had been made to the chosen few by the Society of the Dilettanti, but it remained for one man, Robert Adam, really to lead the general public into the new taste. Adam, a Scotch architect, made the grand tour for the completion of his education, following in the footsteps of his elder brother, who, while acquiring less fame than Robert, shared with him in the creation of the new fashion. France, Italy, and Germany all engaged his attention, but in Italy he came into contact with the active group of archæologist-architects who were excavating the ruined towns at the foot of Vesuvius



PLATE XLVI

Four different sorts of Sheraton small tables—sewing-table,
Pembroke table, and card-tables

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and elsewhere, who were reconstructing the architecture, recalling its erstwhile grandeur and in many cases publishing the results of their work. Adam entered into this fascinating work with a zest and himself studied in detail the lay-out of the great Villa of Diocletian at Spoleto which he was later to publish in England.

At all events, Adam's return to England in 1762 constituted the turning-point in the taste of the country from the over-elaboration of the rococo style toward the cool, restrained formality of the revived classic. This revival differed from that of the earlier attempt at the end of the seventeenth century, in that the Renaissance knowledge of the classic on which the earlier had been based had been derived chiefly from existing remains of monumental Roman architecture,—great baths, temples, triumphal arches, and colossea,—while the later revival was based upon a study of the smaller, domestic work of the later period of Roman art. Here, too, were found remains of the interiors of buildings as well as examples of the furniture and utensils of daily life, creating a new vocabulary for the utilitarian arts.

Robert Adam, with his brothers, exercised an

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unusual influence when once they had settled down to the practice of their profession. Robert, the outstanding one of the trio, was a man of great charm of personality and carried with him the authority of knowledge and the quality of genius. Within a very short time, virtually within the decade, he had been appointed architect to the king and was engaged upon great works for the Crown as well as for many of the nobles of the realm. His output was tremendous, ranging through imposing palaces, large and small city houses, theaters, bridges, and small garden architecture. His designing was not only applied to the larger schemes of grounds and buildings but carried down to the minutest detail of the house-furnishing—furniture, carpets, upholstery, silver, pottery, iron- and brass-work. The impress of his taste is, then, seen to be all-pervasive, and its justness and correctness continually added to his prestige and authority. He is the first great modern architect.

Thus during this third quarter of the eighteenth century in England a complete change came over the expression of taste in all of the arts. The qualities of the new fashion may be briefly outlined. The structural basis was little different from the

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

old. In its use of ornament and architectural detail it followed the baroque precedents, applying them to the structure for decorative effect. Its chief innovation lay in the striking difference in the detail itself from that which had characterized the preceding period. The outstanding contribution of Adam to the larger aspects of the style was the careful and expert employment of consistent scale in all related work, as a result of his study of each problem as a whole. The relation in size between all the different elements of the design was carefully studied, and in the combination of large monumental scale with small secondary ornament his sensitiveness was almost flawless.

The detail with which Adam had been most taken in Italy was delicate, refined, applied to emphasize architectural lines and employing motifs of considerable variety. The use of stucco and papier-mâché ornament lent itself well to the delicate modeling of the Adam work and was much employed. For his decorative carving and painting he called upon painters of more than ordinary ability, marble-carvers of superior technical skill, and modelers who followed his criticism absolutely.

The classic orders of column and entablature,

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often raised upon pedestals, gave the basis for his disposition of design-arrangement. These were varied freely in proportion, the columns attenuated, the entablatures lightened, the detail refined, so that a really new scheme of neo-classic expression was evolved, recalling the Pompeiian delicacy.

The changed taste, tending more and more toward greater refinement, to lower and more delicate modeling, called forth a correspondingly delicate color scale. Soft light tones of gray, blue, green, rose, and cream replaced the full reds, blues, greens, and yellows of the damasks and velvets of the preceding period. The delicate decorations of walls and ceilings were picked out in gold or pale color, with occasional accents of black, terra-cotta, or porphyry.

The planning of the buildings on which Adam worked shows as marked innovations in form and relation of parts as does the detail of their superstructures. The relations of rooms were studied for their dramatic effect of size as well as for the complementary relations of their shapes. Rooms other than rectangular are combined with square or oblong apartments to give variety. Octagonal, round and elliptical rooms, and others rectangular

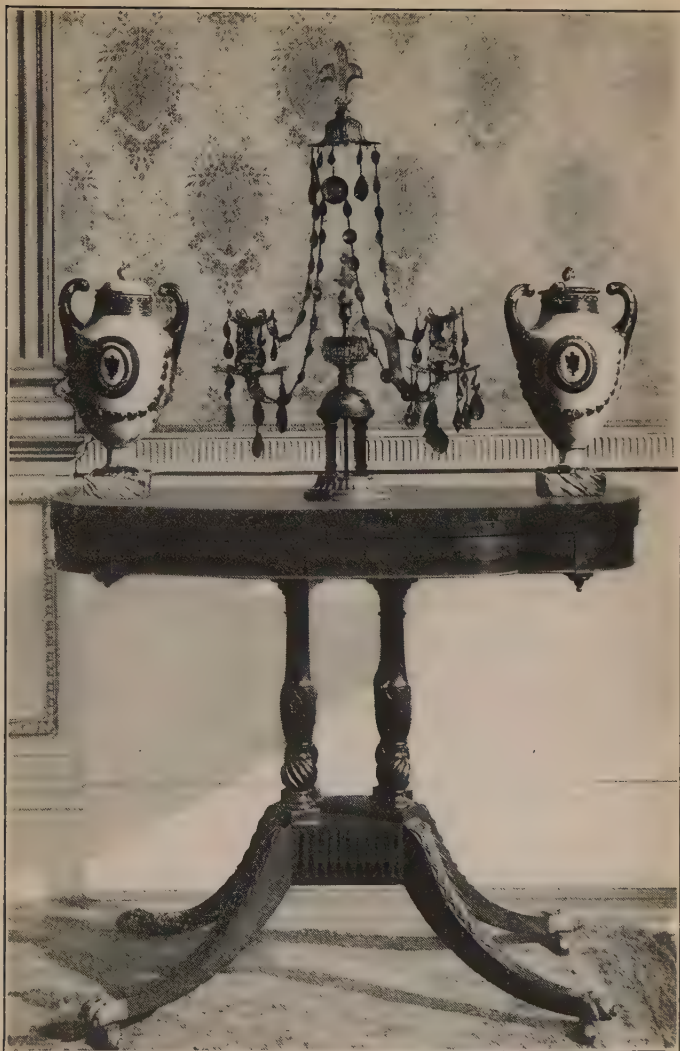


PLATE XLVII

Side table by Duncan Phyfe, set with urns and candelabrum of the period

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

in plan with exedral ends or varied in shape by the use of niches or bay-windows, give possibility of interesting, varied and striking combinations. Ceilings carried out with semicircular, semi-elliptical, and segmental vaults, or others flat with variously shaped coffers, were handsomely ornamented.

To summarize, we may say that, carrying out a complete self-consciousness of taste, an enormous vocabulary of architectural and decorative treatments was evolved for the use of the architect, the cabinet-maker, the worker in metals, textiles, and ceramics. Probably never before had so complete a development of style occurred in England, although it had in France.

The period during which Adam worked was one of comparative peace and plenty. No disastrous wars upset the economic balance, commerce was successfully carried on, wealth rolled in, and the rich and powerful were indulging themselves in extravagance of living. Hence much opportunity was given the architect to put his ideas into execution for the appreciation of a large and rich public. The French and English were for a time at peace and exchanging visits and ideas, while the war in America very little ruffled the surface of

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English life. It was the day of Goldsmith and Burns; the life of Samuel Johnson was coming to a close; Edmund Burke was molding political thought, and Cowper was penning his touching verse.

During the years of Adam's greatest activity and personal influence in England, the relations between the colonies and the mother country were either strained by the conditions of approaching war or by the eight years of war itself. For this reason his contemporary effect upon America was rather slight. In only a few instances was his influence seen in this country before the Revolution, although the books which he published were owned by some of the more cultivated laymen. The new style in America which followed the Adam examples is therefore entirely associated with the new republic, which in romantic spirit modeled itself upon the classic form.

There was, to be sure, some give and take between the two countries other than hostilities. The general feeling in England toward the revolting colonies was never so bitter on the part of the general public as was that in America toward England. Always in the homeland there had been champions of the cause of American freedom, and these men

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had their followings. Then, too, to the average person the colonies seemed remote, and to those who had no connection with them or who had never visited America they had little reality in imagination.

In 1781, during the war, there appeared an advertisement with illustration in the "Gentleman's Magazine" (London) which surprises us by a confession of American superiority, if only in stove-manufacture.

In your magazine for 1747 a correspondent recommends a machine for warming rooms and churches. . . . Since that time great improvements have been made, and the American stoves have been introduced for the same purpose, which are much superior to any before invented; but as these are not universally known, a description of them (chiefly extracted from the account published by Mr. Sharp) cannot fail of being acceptable to the public.—*Amicus*. . . . "The Pennsylvania Fire-Places, commonly known by the Name of American Stoves, invented by Dr. Franklyn, and improved by Mr. Sharp of Leadenhall Street." . . . These stoves are called American because the first patterns of them, in cast iron, were the invention of Dr. Benjamin Franklyn.

These stoves were cast in the Adam designs of the period.

Early American Furniture

The effects of the new style, following in the lead of Adam, were quite fully felt in America within a few years after the close of the war, in 1783, while by 1790 they had come to a true expression. The buildings then being built, the interiors being decorated were often in the "best English style" of the period. An oft-quoted excerpt from the journal of Henry Wansey, a Wiltshire clothier who was in the United States in 1794, will emphasize the point:

Philadelphia, June 8. I dined this day with Mr. Bingham to whom I had a letter of introduction. I found a magnificent house and gardens in the best English style, with elegant and even superb furniture. The chairs of the drawing room were from Seddon's in London, of the newest taste; the back in the form of a lyre, with festoons of crimson and yellow silk. The curtains of the room a festoon of the same. The carpet one of Moore's most expensive patterns. The room was papered in the French taste after the style of the Vatican at Rome.

The complete carpeting of rooms was now in fashion, destined to continue in favor for more than a century. There was much use of wall-paper in repeating patterns, landscape or formal designs of niches with classic figures such as these described by Wansey:



PLATE XLVIII

Unique tall clock
by Duncan Phyfe, fine-
ly veneered, carved and
mounted with ivory

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The Assembly Room [Oeller's Assembly Room] to which we now returned must not pass undescribed: it is a most elegant room, sixty feet square, with a handsome music gallery at one end. It was papered after the French taste, with the Pantheon figures in compartments, imitating festoons; pillars and groups of antique drawings, in the same style as lately introduced in the most elegant houses in London.

For the finer tableware and glass, much of the current English product was imported. The queensware of Wedgwood was excessively popular, as well as his other types of potteries. Cut glass for table use and the beautiful lustres and sconces continued to be imported, although at about this time the manufacture of cut glass was becoming one of the very important American industries. Relieved from the restrictions of English trade laws, the country began to expand in industry and manufacture. Carpets and wall-papers, printed textiles, glass, and iron were all manufactured in increasingly large volume.

The merchant marine was given a new lease of life with the possibility of much export, not only, now, of raw materials and staples but also of manufactured articles to the West Indies

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and Europe. Direct trade with the East began to open up, although its great day was yet to come.

One of the outstanding changes in the taste of the time came from the interest in things French. The terrific debacle of the French Revolution had sent to America large numbers of émigrés who settled particularly in the middle States. These people, deriving chiefly from the upper classes,—nobility, gentry, professional and artistic groups,—spread abroad a knowledge of and admiration for the French genius. The stamp of their taste on the cultural arts of contemporary America was intensified by the sympathy which their plight called forth and by the knowledge of the aid which Frenchmen had brought to the struggling colonies in their hour of need. This influence from France had reached England at the same time, so that by the beginning of the nineteenth century the tastes of England and America in matters of decoration and furnishing were coincident, and tinged with a French flavor. This direct influence of the French emigrés was a first-hand contact which was effective in many branches of the arts. The Latin influence of the French Empire was a general stylistic trend which

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came less through personal contacts than through channels of trade.

The actual intercourse between France and America, while much greater than during the colonial period, was nevertheless sporadic, due to the disturbances of the wars which Napoleon was waging, engaging now the sympathy, now the hostility of America.

Yet the interest ran high in the doings of this seemingly superhuman individual who within so few years had made himself almost the emperor of the world. The American news prints of the time are full of reports of his activities, which took always the chief position on the front page.

The classic revival, which heretofore had been adapted with taste and feeling to its modern use, was intensified by the assumption to himself by Napoleon of the attributes of the Cæsars. To give himself a realistic setting and to his court a *mise en scène* which should harmonize with this desire for imperial grandeur, as First Consul, then Emperor he set the stamp of his approval upon a literal, less delicate and imaginative use of the classic form and detail whose possibilities for gorgeous treat-

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ment had heretofore been subordinated to a desire for restraint and tasteful employment.

The result was a heavy, sumptuous, and rather vulgar style which suited well the taste of the *nouveau noblesse* of the imperial court, as it did to some extent the *nouveau riche* of the American republic. With this full-blown style of the empire, of the classic revival tending toward an unimaginative application, the unbroken tradition of the arts of the western world comes virtually to an end. Artistic imagination has grown weak and the element of stiff correctness, of archæological meticulousness begins to take its place; or rather it may be said that the interests of men's minds were beginning to turn to other realms than the artistic, which began to falter and fall for lack of mental support.

The great tradition of the arts of the West we have seen run its course through many centuries. Finding its original impulse in the Mediterranean basin, where its genesis comes from a union of the East and the West, its course has run from ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, through the contracted epochs of early Christian and medieval times, the expanding period of the Renaissance, and the first centuries of modern times in the seventeenth,

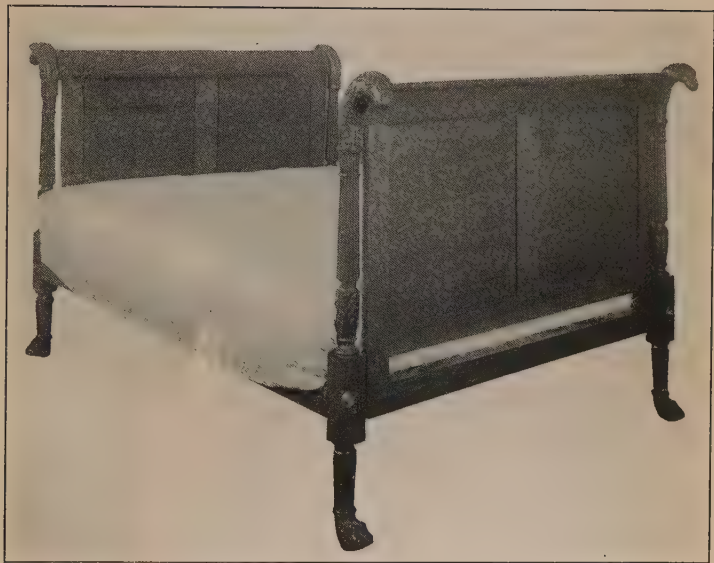


PLATE XLIX

French bed by Duncan Phyfe, with eagle heads on posts

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eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Expanding the bounds of its Mediterranean origins, this tradition has spread through many lands, through many centuries. In each chronological period it has taken on certain characteristics due to external influences which mark it as of its particular time. In the various nations in which it has thrived it has assumed certain other characteristics which have registered the peculiar tastes and preferences of each nation. To America in the early seventeenth century that tradition was carried, and here it thrived, running in general parallel to its European expression, at the same time assuming certain forms and usages which give it a peculiar character. At all times, however, its expression records the state of mind, the economic well-being and the social organization of the civilization of the new land, whether in divergence from or relation to the taste of the English people.

Of all the arts which this tradition includes within itself, none responds more rapidly nor more flexibly to its changes and subtleties than does the art of furniture design and furniture-making. Hence we may see in all of this discussion of the furniture of colonial and early republican America

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a record of her cultural life, the ways of living from day to day of her people, the social usages which they professed, and the economic conditions which surrounded them.

THE FURNITURE

To begin a study of the furniture of this last period of the old tradition, we must start with a glance at the English furniture produced under the design influence of the Adam brothers, of whom—as we have said—Robert was probably the most highly endowed with taste and genius.

When the new classic style which Adam had introduced had so taken hold of the public that his patrons began to entrust to him the design of their household furniture and equipment, there was a large group of highly trained cabinet-makers and carvers to enlist in his service. It was only necessary for these men to apply their skill to a different sort of form and detail, which they quickly assimilated. Chippendale himself was among these men, and to him the straight lines and geometrical curves of the new style must have seemed far from difficult.

The furniture design of Adam was based upon the architectural arrangement of the classic orders—

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columns and entablature. Thus in elevation he uses, for the supporting members, the column, architrave, frieze, or cornice—one or all—of the entablature. In conformity with his treatment of the classic form in architecture, he varies the proportions freely to his taste. The delicate columns of the legs are attenuated, the entablature portion is refined and lightened.

In plan he employed the mechanical curves of the circle and ellipse, as well as the free-hand curves of the oval and the serpentine. Rectangles with their corners interrupted by a quarter-circle, segmental curves for the fronts of case furniture mingle with the conventional shapes.

His ornament was generally fine in scale in relation to the whole. He employed veneering, inlay, painting, gilding, carving, and sometimes ormolu mounts. In conformity with the tendency toward lightness of color and delicacy of scale in the architecture, the use of light-colored woods grew in popularity. Veneers and broad inlays in satinwood, holly, sycamore, and tulip all gave a variety, increased by other woods artificially stained. Inlay in narrow strips and in broader bands was used, as well as crisp, fine carving and painted ornament in full color.

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The ornament was placed with careful study, to enhance the structural lines, following classic usage. A great variety of detail was employed, all descendant of the Roman. There were swags of leaves, flowers and husks, pateræ, bucrania, fasces, reeds bound together with ribbands, sunbursts, medallions, panels of round, rectangular, oval, octagonal, and other shapes, animal forms, sphinxes, griffins, and an infinite number of motifs. Some of these were repeating ornament such as guilloche, egg-and-dart, bead-and-reel, leaf-and-tongue, Greek fret, wave, and the whole list of classic repeating forms applied to moldings and friezes. It is impossible to mention by name all of these classically inspired details which were employed in carved, inlaid, and painted ornament.

In the execution of his designs, Adam employed the fine cabinet-makers, carvers, and painters of the day, made the designs, superintended their execution; but he himself was not skilled in these crafts. His designs were purely theoretical ones, worked out on paper, criticized intellectually, the materials specified and the rest left to the ingenuity of the craftsman under the architect's guidance. Under this discriminating and critical tutelage these men

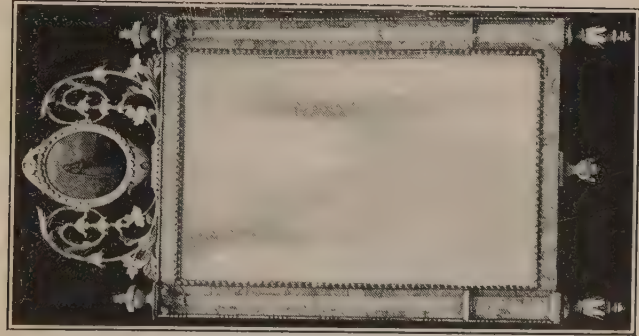


PLATE I

Three looking-glasses of the Early Republic—a so-called Bilboa glass at left, with frame of colored marbles and gilded ornaments

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developed a great artistry in the materials of their craft.

As we have said, the direct Adam influence did not come to America in its purity, except in a very few cases in the architecture. As to furniture, it may almost be said that none was made in America in the Adam style. By the time that close relations were established with England, after the war, and the fund of suggestions for furniture in the new style began to pour into America, the cabinet-makers in England had grown away from the stricter interpretation of the Adam mode and were working in a freer fashion.

Under the patronage of Adam the designer, the furniture-makers had developed their own ideas with such skill that without his guidance there were produced pieces of much artistic quality. Preserving the general proportion and forms, the straight lines and the curves suggested by the architectural taste of Adam, the practical cabinet-makers created their own designs, which interpreted these Adam ideas in methods expressing more accurately the materials in which they worked. The Adam designs frequently lacked any particular harmony with the material in which they were to be executed, a given

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design being equally susceptible of execution in wood, metal, stucco, or stone. The craft artistry which thinks its designs in the terms of the materials in which they are to be executed, was made apparent in the designs of those cabinet-makers who were equally familiar with the woods in which they worked and the designs in which the woods were modeled.

There were hundreds of cabinet-makers working in England at this time. Certain of these were excellent designers, and in their train followed those men whose skill lay chiefly in their craft.

We have, as guides for the taste in furniture of the period, books of designs published by some of these men, which give us an idea of their thought. One of these is the volume of designs entitled "The Cabinet Maker's and Upholsterer's Guide," issued by A. Hepplewhite and Co. in 1788-89, containing designs for furniture which had already been executed in preceding years, as well as suggestions for new creations. In this book we can note the transition from the stricter Adam treatments to those of the practical cabinet-maker. We see some pieces in almost the straight Adam style, and others in which a softening of line shows the influence of

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

some of the French work of the late period of Louis XV. Many of the cold mechanical curves of the Adam usage are translated into finer free-hand curves and the modeling of the forms is more freely handled.

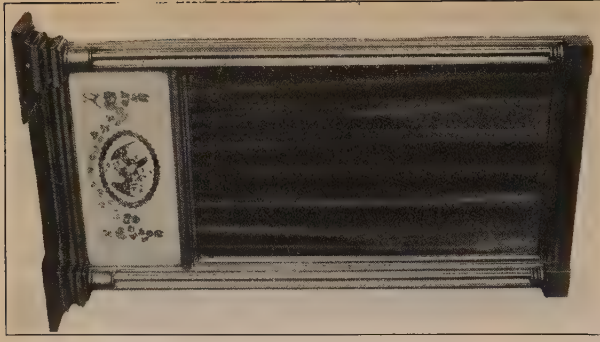
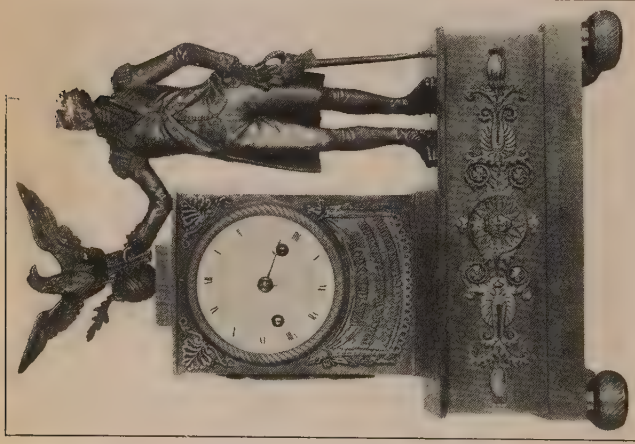
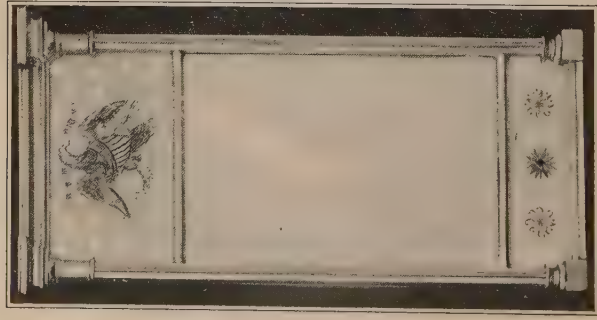
A few innovations of form are suggested. Hepplewhite shows two designs for sideboards of types with which we are now familiar. Before this time the Adam sideboard had been the side table on the same idea as Chippendale's, usually flanked by pedestals whose interiors were fitted either as plate-warmers or as cellarettes and often topped with urns as containers for knives and forks. Hepplewhite first drew together this group of three pieces into one, with a central shallow drawer and at the ends deep drawers for decanters.

There were many designs for chairs, tables, desks, beds, cornices, and all manner of pieces introducing decoration by carving, painting, veneering, and inlay. Elaborate forms of drapery and upholstery were suggested and the subdivision of many sorts of case furniture to suit special uses. This book came into the hands of virtually all good cabinet-makers, and assisted much in the unification of taste.

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In the same way, the plates and text published in 1792 by Thomas Sheraton and brought together under the title of "The Cabinet-Maker's and Upholsterer's Drawing Book" was widely owned. The list of subscribers to the book, before publication, contains the name of hundreds of cabinet-makers and upholsterers. In this volume, and in the appendix to it published in the following year, is shown a large variety of tables, chairs, desks, beds, dressing-tables, looking-glasses, secretaries, and several sideboards. The continued influence of the classic is seen in the fact that much space is given to the exposition of the Roman orders, Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite.

The two books formed the basis of most of the furniture of the early republic in America. They must have come over within a few years of each other and in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first of the nineteenth, and the forms and the ornaments suggested in Hepplewhite's and Sheraton's plates were adapted to American work. In the cities were many cabinet-makers, and often these were banded together into a society or guild, establishing prices for work and promulgating the use of certain designs.



Two looking-glasses and a French gilt-bronze clock with Washington and American eagle
(A misquotation in inscription under face of clock was corrected in later versions)

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The interpretation of these engraved designs is most interesting when we compare the executed design with the engraving. Simplification usually occurs, and particularly in America the more elaborate and painted pieces were uncommon.

Most of the American work partakes of the Sheraton rather than of the Hepplewhite feeling. The proportions are light and delicate, inlay and veneering predominate in the decoration. In general there is a preference for lighter wood than in the past, the mahogany often being of the light sherry color combined with broad veneers of satinwood or curly maple. Many of the chairs are of the darker solid straight-grain mahogany where carving or molding occurs.

Delicate bands of inlay in white woods, combined with dark, are used on the slender legs and the edges of tops of tables, sideboards, and chests of drawers. Panel forms, round, oval, tombstone, and rectangular with cusped corners, are outlined in narrow inlay with figured veneers inside. Other pieces with little or no inlay have exquisite moldings.

The chairs, particularly, of this period show great excellence of design and workmanship. Many designs of chairs and chair-backs are shown in the

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design-books which we have mentioned. Virtually all of these have ajouré backs which developed from the Chippendale innovation. To classify these chair-back designs is difficult. There are transitional forms in which the cupid bow of the Chippendale is varied for the top rail by curving its ends down into the back posts and by the use of a splat in more or less classic urn form. Another Hepplewhite treatment, and one perhaps best known, is the shield-shaped chair-back. The shield-shaped outline sometimes contains a central splat, more frequently is subdivided by curved ribs radiating from a half-rossette in the center of the bottom.

The legs of these more strictly Hepplewhite types are usually square. They are molded, fluted, reeded, or have a shallow panel. They taper delicately toward the bottom and many have the spade foot. Others, without spade feet, curve gently outward at the bottom, reminiscent of the French taste.

The chair-seats are sometimes straight-edged, but more often have sides which curve out slightly from the back posts. Both of these forms occasionally have the front seat-rail in serpentine shape. The upholstery may be fixed on the chair, coming down over the seat-rail and finished with brass tacks, or it

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

may be affixed on a slip-seat frame and fitted within the seat-rails.

All sorts of materials are used for this upholstery—silks, satins, velvets, needlework, haircloth, and printed linen.

There is a great variety of the Sheraton chairs. Most of the chair-backs follow predominating straight lines, varied with segmental curves. The illustrations will show these varieties clearly. Carving, molding, and delicate turning are the chief decorative methods, although inlay occurs in some cases. Some of the most exquisite examples have only molding and turning, in which latter method the makers were particularly skilled. The legs of the usual Sheraton chairs are less decoratively treated than the Hepplewhite. If they are square—as they may be—they do not always have fluting or the spade foot, although they may have a tiny line of inlay. The more characteristic chairs have round legs, either plainly turned with an entasis and delicately molded tops or, more frequently, reeded. The bottom of the leg is turned into some appropriate form. Small window-seats are charming adaptations of the chair designs.

There are also upholstered chairs, wing chairs,

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and arm-chairs, some with woodwork showing only in the legs, some with wooden arms.

Sofas and settees of various sorts utilize many of the characteristic details of the chairs, the legs turned and reeded, the arms finishing at the rail with turned or carved urns. A form of Hepplewhite provenance has the curved back similar to the Chippendale "camel-back," either all upholstered or with a wooden frame showing. In some of these the back curves forward into the arms without an angle breaking the line, in others the rolled upholstered arm of the Chippendale sofa is retained, the only difference between the two periods being seen in the legs.

A group of very fine examples of Sheraton sofas would seem to come from Salem and are attributed to the architect-carver Samuel McIntire. These sofas have mahogany frames surrounding the upholstery. The backs vary much in shape. Some have a central rectangular panel carved with flowers, others a group of flowers growing out of a molded frame which tops the back and arms. The similarity in technique displayed in all of these would prove them from the same hand, whether or not that of McIntire. A characteristic touch is the tooled back-

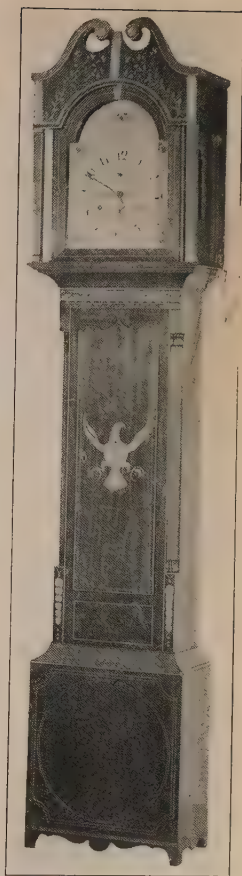


PLATE LII

Two tall clocks inlaid with American eagle, and (center) fine
banjo clock with painted glass panel

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

ground of the panels, where flowers or other devices are used in rectangular medallions. Some furniture of this sort comes from the great house built by McIntire for Elias Hasket Derby. It is likely that a good deal of furniture for this house was made in the McIntire shop.

Chests of drawers and chests-on-chest were popular forms. Their fronts were straight, bowed, or serpentine; the materials mahogany alone, mahogany and satinwood, mahogany and maple, cherry, and other fruit woods. Some of the chests of drawers have reeded or plain colonettes at the corners, with the top breaking out in a three-quarter circle over them.

The drawer-fronts might be veneered with fine crotch mahogany, or inlaid with fine lines or borderings. They often finish with a tiny bead mold. Others may have panel shapes outlined with delicate inlay surrounding beautifully figured satinwood or curly maple, or the difference might be marked merely by the use of light- and dark-toned mahogany.

The chests-on-chest and the wardrobes were usually comparatively plain pieces decorated with veneered patterns and inlay.

Early American Furniture

Fine little dressing-tables received a delicate touch, some formed much like small sideboards, others of the *poudreuse* type, opening out with two leaves which, when closed, form the top.

Desks, secretaries, and china-cabinets were made in various forms. The slant-top desk of the old form continued in favor, veneered and inlaid. The usual foot for this type—as also for many of the chests of drawers—was a development of the earlier bracket foot. In this later form, no base molding occurs below the drawers, but the vertical line curves gently out at the corners while the bracket part continues the line of the bottom, usually cut out to a design of interrelated curves.

The secretaries are very handsome; the tops often have scrolled or straight pediments with grill-work filling in the triangular spaces; or in others a solid scrolled cresting. Their corners may be surmounted by turned or carved finials or with brass urns. The cornices may be plainly molded or decorated with dentils or brackets. Glass doors, when used, are subdivided in interesting patterns.

In some secretaries the slant-top desk obtains; more often there is a drawer with fall front which is fitted up with desk equipment.

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

Another type has the cartonnier closed with doors or sliding tambour-work, with a flap below, baize-covered, which opens out to form the writing surface.

There is so large a variety of treatments that it is impossible to describe all. But the characteristic decorative treatment is applied to many older forms, which gives them a lighter and more delicate effect, while the straight structural lines recall the classic derivation of the ornament.

Quantities of very fine tables were made in this period. There were dining-tables in sections with drop leaves which could be set together to form one long board, side tables rectangular or semicircular, card-tables with flap leaves, pembroke tables with two drop leaves, tripod tables, candle-stands, low and high, sewing-tables with drawers and a work-bag, and console tables for formal arrangement.

The dining-tables usually have square tapering legs, inlaid, or round legs with turning and reeding. Shallow aprons are delicately proportioned, inlaid or veneered, and inlay in oval or other form often occurs at the top of the leg. The end sections of these tables are frequently curved and have one rectangular drop leaf supported on a gate leg. The

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central section which fits between has two rectangular drop leaves.

The card-tables are straight, bow, or serpentine fronted with inlay and veneering, the legs reeded or turned or both. Some have the treatment with the circular legs projecting at the corners, one quarter engaged, the corner of the tops following them in plan with three-quarter circles.

The tripod tables have turned pedestals, with legs either in a reverse curve or in one flowing concave curve. The legs are usually square in section. The cabriole leg has completely disappeared, as have the ball-and-claw and other feet which are associated with it. In these tables of the late eighteenth century the spade foot sometimes occurs, sometimes no foot at all, and again we find a small turned foot or knob set under the end of the simple concave curve. In some cases a delicate paw foot is used, but without the ball, this either carved from the wood or of cast brass, attached.

The sewing-tables and bedside tables are particularly charming, delicate in line, varied in shape—rectangular, oval, or clover-leaf—supported on high thin legs or on a pedestal with tripod base.

The sideboards are handsome examples of the

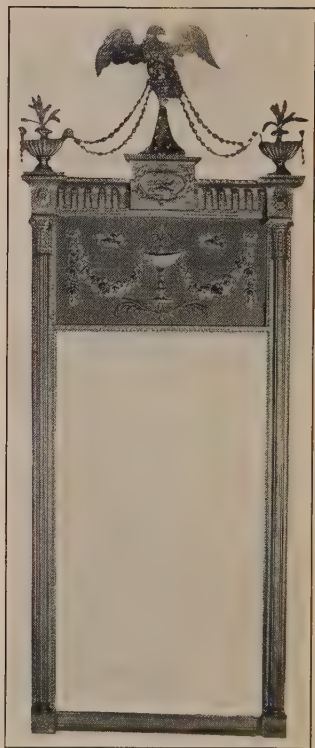


PLATE LIII

Two looking-glasses of the Early Republic, one with painted glass and one with carved-wood upper panel

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

period and inherit much of the monumental quality of the court cupboards of the seventeenth century. They are long and broad, with four or six legs in the front. The simpler form has an elliptical arch in the center, below a long shallow drawer and between two legs, this composition flanked by deep decanter drawers or door compartments with shallow drawers above them and legs at the corner. The compartments are often quarter-circles in plan. A more elaborate form introduces, at each side of the central section, tall narrow drawers for decanters and a small drawer above. This calls for a third leg on each side of the center. Still another arrangement omits the central arch and closes this space with doors.

The whole front is consistently treated with veneers and inlay in wood of contrasting grains and colors. The characteristic panel forms—round, oval, rectangular with cusped corners, single and double tombstone—are all used. Inlaid lines, ovals containing shells or sunbursts, drops of bell-flowers or husks on the legs are used in many combinations. Some of the later boards have round reeded legs carrying up to a carved section at the top, half or three quarters engaged, the top breaking over them.

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Some very fine examples have a serpentine curve in the center, and the door compartments may be recessed and flanked by quarter-cylinders.

On these sideboards usually stood matched pairs of knife-boxes, inlaid and with keyhole escutcheons of ivory or silver, or urn-shaped with inlaid, carved, and turned decorations.

Buffets were variations of the sideboard, but usually stood higher and had only shallow drawers below the top. A very few examples exist of marble-topped mixing-tables with compartments for bottles and decanters.

The tall clocks differ little in general form from those of the preceding period. The differences are merely those of the detail of decoration. The Sheraton substitute for the bracket foot is usual, the posts are veneered and inlaid in the typical designs, the scrolled pediments are more delicate, and the faces are more often painted white and decorated with flowers and other ornament than brass, with relief ornament in the corners. Mantel-clocks became very popular in the early nineteenth century, and the earliest of these clock-cases are very strictly of the Sheraton type, although their date is somewhat late for this style. The case is flanked by delicately

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

turned colonettes, and a scrolled pediment surmounts it, brightened by brass urns. The wall-clock known as the banjo-clock is one of the successful adaptations of form to use. These clocks had delicate wooden enframement, filled in with decorated glass, surmounted by a carved finial and sometimes resting on a carved bracket. The fine ones are gilded, although other handsome ones are mahogany, carved and parcel gilt.

Looking-glasses of the period are delicate and beautiful. The frames of the most characteristic ones are of architectural form, with half-colonettes or pilasters at the side, supporting an entablature. They are subdivided into an oblong upper panel of glass or wood and a lower of mirror. The upper panel is decorated with painting on the glass, or gilded ornament in landscape scenes, or symbolic motifs. An airy and delicate cresting of plaster leaves and volutes finishes the top, the central space being occupied with some form of urn.

Another form of cresting has a central oval medallion with decorated center enframed in wood and with elaborate openwork carving at each side, this cresting resting on a rectangular frame of molded and carved wood. This is perhaps an intrinsically

Early American Furniture

finer type. In addition to these, the old form of mahogany veneered frame continues with top and bottom cut out in a scrolled design and with inlay in the frame and sometimes in medallions at the center of the top. Some delicate renditions of the broken-pediment type of glass with moldings date from this period, a gilded eagle in the center and gilded drops of leaves falling at each side.

Still another very popular form is the circular looking-glass with convex mirror, more rarely concave, sometimes combined with candle-branches to form a girandole. The round frames, carved or with composition ornament, are set frequently with gilded balls in the cove of the molded frame, and are topped by an eagle or decorative carving of scrolls or leaves. At the bottom a small triangular composition of scrolls and leaves finishes them off.

Very fine furniture of this period was made up and down the coast, from New England to Virginia. Comparatively few of the makers of the existing pieces are known, only occasionally does a piece come to light with the maker's label still intact.

The New England cabinet-makers were particularly prolific, and a great deal of their work is of quite unusual excellence. Much employment of



PLATE LIV

A mahogany-framed looking-glass, and one of gilded carved wood bearing painted glass medallion commemorating death of Washington

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

light-toned woods is seen in the locality, and certain special designs of inlay. The beautifully made little satinwood desk (Plate XLII) bears the label of John Seymour & Son, Creek Square, Boston, and is the basis of attribution to him of a few items of similar fine workmanship. To McIntire certain pieces are ascribed on circumstantial grounds only.

In New York a few names are associated with certain makers. There is Duncan Phyfe whose more characteristic work is easily recognized, Allston who worked about the same time and in some cases in a very similar style, Lannieuier of French extraction who introduced an Empire feeling into his work. A large mahogany secretary of simple design, inlaid, bears the label of Thomas Burling, 56 Beekman Street, New York, which adds another to the list of identified New York cabinet-makers.

There is a special group of furniture which may be mentioned here—the so-called eagle furniture. (Plate XLIII). Most of these pieces are in conventional Sheraton form, with inlaid lines and no carving. Their distinguishing feature is an inlaid medallion, generally oval, in which is contained the American eagle. This eagle assumes different poses and is combined with stars for the States of the

Early American Furniture

Union, with the striped shield of the seal of the United States; or in some cases the eagle with a shield on its breast holds an olive branch. Another form shows the eagle supporting a pike on which rests a liberty cap. This latter pattern is taken directly from French Revolutionary furniture of the period, as is this whole idea of the patriotic inlay, whose use is based upon some French contemporary examples and was probably introduced into this country by French émigrés.

The eagle inlay occurs on tables, secretaries, chests of drawers, desks, clocks, and looking-glasses. It is a treatment in questionable taste, perhaps, but represents a time when the stricter canons of good taste were somewhat demoralized, and it is saved from vulgarity by the fact that all of the furniture in which it is employed is of the simple, well-made type, and otherwise not over-decorated.

In the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century we see a new turn given to this revived classic, in the more literal use of classic forms—resulting from the Napoleonic styles in France. Under the Bonaparte régime the classic idea was applied with little imagination,—as it was later seen in America,—but at first in the United States it was adapted to the

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

light and graceful scale and decoration which were carried over from the eighteenth century, although many antique forms were literally copied.

This influence is seen in the legs and backs of chairs, where the backward curve of the rear legs and back, and the forward curve of the front legs, imitated the chairs of ancient Rome and Greece. Again, the crossed S legs of the classic curule chair were employed with questionable success. A use of brass for inlay and molding became more common as this French influence increased.

Much of the furniture of this type, transitional between the straight early Sheraton forms and the Empire, is quite successful. Phyfe and his contemporaries turned out many pieces in which the older method of decoration predominated, applied to an Empire form and others in which Empire ornament is applied to straight Sheraton form. The editions of Sheraton's "Drawing Book" continued to appear, the last of them being dated 1803. In this are shown many ugly designs, which fall into two groups. One is of the type which in England is called Regency—that is, a very much coarsened Sheraton in which the ornament is enlarged in scale, and the just relation of parts is so interrupted as to play havoc with the

Early American Furniture

fine proportion. The second type introduced in this last Sheraton book is the heavy furniture in which the classic forms, unimaginatively used, give an almost grotesque character to some of the designs. Both of these groups have their exemplars in America, but chiefly fall into the next period. The full effect of the French Empire style is not seen until after the War of 1812, between England and America.

There were certain decorative motifs, however, which would seem to have come in with the Empire influence for carved decoration, such as the fascis carved on some mahogany sofas or the lion foot with eagle wing used as a sofa leg. The ends of sofas recalled again the Roman furniture in their out-curving arms and in the so-called *Récamier* form with a low roll at the bottom and a higher out-curving head. Some of the most influential designing of furniture of the period was done in France by David d'Anger, in whose paintings his furniture is recorded.

The chairs with out-curving front legs or with legs of crossed S curves, sofas with the latter type of legs, with the *Récamier* form or with the lion-foot-eagle-wing leg are all still within the traditional

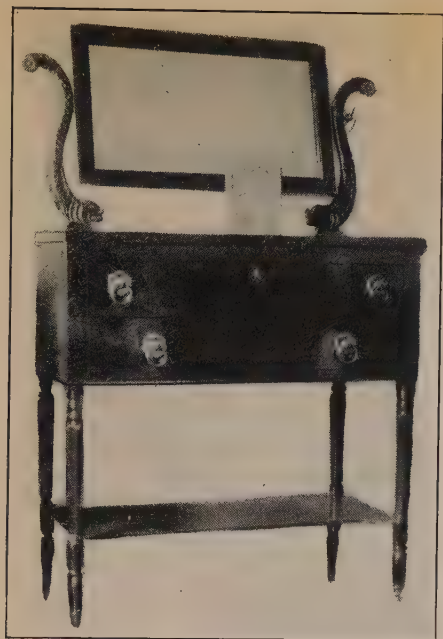


PLATE LV

Three pieces of furniture in so-called American Empire
style

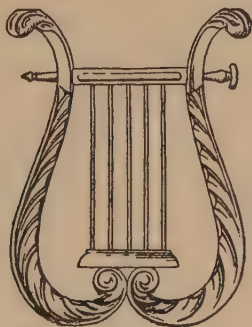
(The dressing table bears the label of Allston, who worked in
New York around 1820-25)

Stylistic Attainment and Classical Revival

development. The craftsmanship remains fine and the ornament is executed with care. There are still employed some of the older details such as reeding, rosettes, panels with carved drapery or wheat. It is only when the mechanical methods of the early nineteenth century begin to predominate that we can point to a complete breakdown of traditional quality.

This becomes noticeable in the United States about 1820, although many charming and fine pieces were made after that date.

We shall end this period, then, with the tentative introduction of the Empire forms and detail which, delicately treated, were kept in consistent scale with the prevailing Sheraton methods.





CHAPTER VI

ARTISTIC PLAGIARISM

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

THE nineteenth century was fairly well under way before the full indication of its ultimate direction became evident. It had glided so easily out of its predecessor that it was not until almost a quarter of a century had passed that the implication of a new mental orientation became definite.

Well back in the eighteenth century in Europe a scientific interest had been developing parallel with the artistic expression of the life of the time. New methods of transportation were being studied, new ways of labor-saving were being tried, the economic importance of manufacture was bringing to bear upon its methods the thought of many minds. That great and most typical American, Franklin, welded together in his life many of the interests which held the civilized world in thrall.

Artistic Plagiarism

International and human relations, the fine arts, inventions for practical ends, from the wood-stove to the lightning-rod, even the study of musical instruments in which his harmonica was somewhat of an innovation—all these showed the many facets of the mind of a most educated man of the eighteenth century.

A significant indication of this scientific interest in the early eighteenth century may be seen in the archæological investigation which had thrown a new light upon Roman life and civilization. In the latter part of the century it had focussed upon that of ancient Greece.

The spectacular career of Napoleon had concentrated upon France not only the military offensive of the other great nations but also the profound interest of all the world. The influence of Napoleonic strategy in war, of the Napoleonic code in law, of Napoleonic style in art, all laid their impress upon the nations of the western world, sometimes with good, sometimes with ill result. Yet France by this had again regained her position of dictator in many spheres of activity.

The spirit of democracy was abroad at the turn of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and its

Early American Furniture

effects were seen in many nations of Europe. In France, where the revolutionary principles and the power of the people had made themselves so violently felt, evidences of this modern feeling were given in the making and unmaking of kings. Louis XVIII and Charles X of the restored Bourbon line were superseded in 1830 by Louis Philippe, whose astute diplomacy had given him the reputation of being a prince of truly democratic belief. A reinstated nobility strove to bring back the surroundings and atmosphere of its ancestors. The tradition of the divine right of kings had vanished in fact, but as much as possible of its accompanying trappings was retained. The rationalistic spirit of eighteenth-century France was seen in its true expression in this frank election of kings and this tacit recognition of the power of the people.

In England the same situation in governmental affairs was delayed by the habit of centuries and the insular inertia which forbade sudden change. George III died in 1820, but for many years his insanity had left him little but a name, his son, who became George IV, exercising the powers of Regent.

With the accession of the fourth George there be-



PLATE LVI

Two provincial early eighteenth-century interiors set with appropriate furniture made of maple, cherry, or pine

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gan a general liberalizing by governmental policy, which was influenced to a great extent by the development of scientific inventions destined to give its peculiar character to the whole of the nineteenth century.

The latter part of the preceding century had seen the realization of several important inventions. A number of English inventors perfected for practical purposes machines which were of supreme importance to her most basic industry, the weaving of cotton and woolen goods. The industrial revolution is thereby heralded, the farthest reacting influence of many years, creating the industrial system which, combined with commercial enterprise, was to change entirely the character of a large portion of English life.

To supplement these inventions of labor-saving machinery, a new and greater motive power than any before used was discovered to be that of the expansive power of steam. James Watt for fully fifty years was perfecting the construction of the steam-engine. With machines which could do in little time the work of many hands, with a motive power far greater than any which could be economically or regularly supplied by natural elements,

Early American Furniture

the whole system of manufacture in England changed.

This industrial advantage was enjoyed almost exclusively by England until after the downfall of Napoleon, when these processes began to come into general use on the Continent and in America. At the same time the long series of continental wars had contributed to English commercial expansion. She alone, almost, had not been invaded nor her industries interrupted, and it was upon her that the war-torn countries across the channel relied for many of the necessities which ordinarily they would have produced for themselves. Her merchant marine, too, continued its growth, for Britain controlled the seas.

One of the results of this growth in commerce and manufacture was the rise of a new-rich class whose wealth was derived from the factory system, from trade, or from transport. Groups of these men became powerful both in England and America and held much influence at the seats of government.

In the realm of the arts, all of these things were having their effect. The fluid state of the Continent during the Napoleonic time, the marching and counter-marching of armies, coupled with the pres-

Artistic Plagiarism

tige of France, spread the French taste in matters of art to all corners. The mechanical inventions, or rather the principles on which they were based, were found applicable for use in connection with certain art crafts which had formerly been the work of human hands. The general increase in wealth which followed the growth of the industrial system created a demand for those articles which were being manufactured in larger and larger quantities, a demand increased by the rising standards of living in the lower and middle classes, a result of the growth of democratic principles in government.

In America this period is one of very rapid change. The consciousness of a new self-reliance and self-confidence was the natural result of independence. Patriotism of a "spread-eagle" sort put in great demand all American-made products. At the same time a very close contact with Europe, a vivid interest in all that was transpiring there, drew to this country the suggestions which were to be found abroad. In matters of taste the most outstanding fact is the change, within the first quarter of the century, from an English to a French interest, the years of the embargo on English goods giving opportunity to French exporters which they

Early American Furniture

were quick to grasp. The English conservatism, slow to change, was less congenial to the more liberal feelings of the citizens of the United States than was the democracy of the French, based upon liberty, equality, and fraternity. This was strengthened by the large numbers of French people who were coming here, both after the Revolution in France and after the downfall of Napoleon. There was always present, too, the consciousness of the aid which France had given to America in the struggle for independence. The enthusiastic reception of Lafayette in 1824 shows the strength of this feeling, even after forty years.

As the country settled down to adjust itself to the new conditions its particular flavor was derived from a combination of several elements. The heated political controversy of the time was determining the ways in which the Government would function under stress of actual practice. There was a tremendous geographical expansion. The frontiers were being permanently pushed to the west and south—the Mohawk Valley, the Western Reserve, the Ohio and the Mississippi valleys all being taken up by permanent settlements. The purchase of Louisiana had opened up that territory, too, to

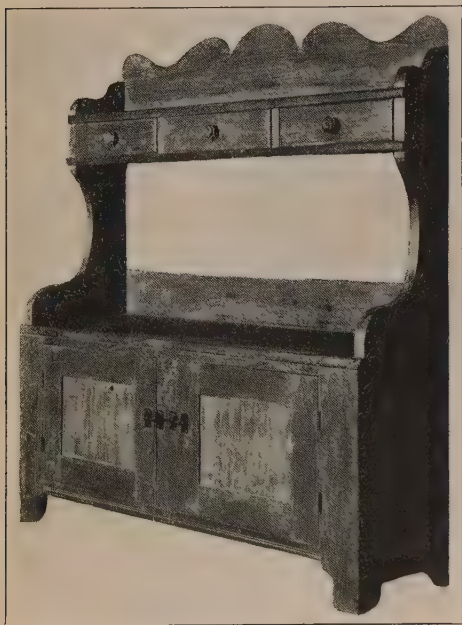


PLATE LVII

Three provincial pieces of Pennsylvania German types

(The chair at upper right carries on a seventeenth - century tradition)

Artistic Plagiarism

settlement by Eastern pioneers, the final push westward coming with the rush to the Pacific coast in '49.

Men's minds were therefore primarily engaged with matters of a realistic and practical nature. Science, practically applied, was putting to work the ideas of the inventors. The use of steam in both transportation and manufacture, labor-saving machines for weaving, printing, and the working of wood and metals, the invention of the telegraph—all of these engaged the principal attention of the creative minds of the day. The corollary to this was a parallel development of commerce and trade. American ships, finally freed from interference from England, were pushing farther and farther from home. The clipper-ship era—one of the most thrilling and romantic episodes in American expansion—brought contacts with the far East, an enormous and valuable trade being developed. The whaling industry, of equal romance, carried New England ships to far-distant climes. The trade in the accustomed channels was increased, to the continent of Europe, to Africa, India, and particularly the West Indics.

Inland transportation became a very great enter-

Early American Furniture

prise. The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 was of epoch-making importance, although its day was short-lived by reason of the rapid development of the steam railway. Steam as applied to inland water-transport opened up the great navigable rivers of the interior, the Ohio and the Mississippi, giving an access to the sea from beyond the Alleghanies.

All of this expansion created a somewhat disjointed society, a social order much less compact and homogeneous than had existed throughout the eighteenth century in the colonies. There remained many of the older groups in the Eastern cities carrying on their usual life. Then there were the new rich who, profiting by manufacture, commerce, or trade, were amassing fortunes with rapidity. Farther inland were the more recent settlements, usually made up of Eastern groups, who were extending the frontier to the westward, carrying the traditions of the Eastern colonies into the interior.

These groups, and other smaller ones, were ranged antagonistically, the social and business prestige of the older aristocracy, whose wealth had come in the eighteenth century from commerce, was counterbalanced by the wealth of the nouveau-riche manu-

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facturers whose greater strength was drawn from conditions of contemporary life. The triumph of the latter, representative of the "people," was marked by the inauguration in 1829 of Andrew Jackson as President of the United States, a sharp break in the aristocratic tradition which had gathered about the White House.

In all of this period we see the chief occupation of men's minds with things other than artistic, the cultural emphasis being placed upon less esoteric things than the fine arts, on invention and scientific investigations with their practical application to commercial use, on politics and business activities. Such an atmosphere permeating the world, it is but natural that the best creative minds of the time should have been engaged in similar thought. Until well through the eighteenth century, men of this type had usually expressed themselves in artistic ways, as either creative artists or generous patrons or enthusiastic connoisseurs. Scientific interest had not been neglected, but its part had been subsidiary and either an abstract intellectual exercise or a means to an end. Its position, however, changed immediately to one of preponderance when once its application to commercial and industrial use was

Early American Furniture

developed, and with this change much of the creative mental energy of the men of the nineteenth century was turned to this direction.

Two American painters are accurate examples of this change, within their own lives bridging the transition. Robert Fulton and Samuel F. B. Morse, were both portrait-painters of more than ordinary excellence. Their work is still present and stands high in estimation. Fulton's chief fame rests not upon his painting but upon his perfection of the use of steam in navigation. Morse is not generally known as the artist or the lecturer upon fine arts that he was but as the inventor of the telegraph. Here in these two lives we see the same type of mind expressing itself first in artistic ways, then, in response to contemporary pressure and interest, turning to scientific work of far-reaching import.

It is the mingling of all of these impulses which gives to the furniture of the period from about 1815 to 1850 its peculiar character. At the same time, behind it is the Romantic movement, which, beginning well back in the preceding century, came to a full growth during the later period, producing its literature in prose and verse, its plays and criti-



PLATE LVIII

Pennsylvania German dresser and dough-tray of
late eighteenth or early nineteenth century
(The dresser carries on an early character)

Artistic Plagiarism

cism. The freedom of Greece as championed by Lord Byron in song and person, gave a point to the employment of Greek forms in modern use. Victor Hugo and Walter Scott assisted the cult of the revived Gothic by vitalizing in fictional form the ideas of medieval life. The hard-headed business man of the day was all the more ready to respond to this romantic appeal by reason of the fact that it formed a complete change from his usual thought.

Historically and humanistically this period, whose heyday came while Victoria and Albert ruled in England and Louis Philippe in France, is of extreme interest. Artistically it would seem to lack the vital quality of fine artistic achievement which comes when interest in such things is single and undivided. Artistic production seems for a time to have taken a very secondary place in public opinion; its appeal now is to come from its inventiveness, its strangeness or freakishness, its cleverness of mechanical workmanship, and its romantic suggestion, rather than from its esthetic qualities of proportion, line, color, scale, or fineness of craftsmanship. In some cases many of the latter are present, but this is less the rule than the exception. In looking at

Early American Furniture

this furniture, therefore, it is necessary to use one's critical sense continually, in order not to miss those points which are intrinsically of high merit, not to be entirely taken in by the superficial cleverness or quaintness of much which one sees of the time.

THE FURNITURE

When we get well into the nineteenth century we find a great difficulty in distinguishing at all accurately between European-made and American-made furniture. By the end of the first quarter of the century, the styles of Europe were of almost contemporary appearance in America, the materials used in furniture were virtually the same, the employment more and more of mechanical methods of working eliminated often the personal element of the craftsman, and except for the simple common furniture, the styles were identical.

Stylistically speaking, the period is anomalous. Several different so-called styles were being agitated at the same time. They were generally, however, not genuine styles, in that their differences were chiefly those of ornament and not at all the fundamental ones of new form or structure or design

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feeling. Almost the sole thing which can be considered as a fundamentally sincere effort, was the harmony occasionally achieved between machine work and the designs which it interpreted. This relation sometimes rings true, more often it does not exist, the machine being forced to tasks which only the hand of the craftsman could satisfactorily accomplish.

One of the things which surprise us most when we begin to look at the design-books on which the nineteenth-century furniture is modeled, is the early date at which appeared designs generally considered to be of much more recent date. These books were appearing in the United States almost simultaneously with their appearance abroad.

The last edition of Sheraton's book, published in 1802-03, contained many plates, leading from his early designs into those of the Empire; there are even a few suggestions of Gothic detail to be seen.

Another work, whose title-page bears the date 1808, is "A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration," by George Smith, Upholsterer Extraordinary to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. This is filled with all sorts and kinds of designs in "Roman" and

Early American Furniture

"Greek," Empire and "Gothic" styles. Although the classic details predominate considerably over the Gothic, there are some curious examples of an ill-assorted marriage between the two. In this volume the style which we know as the neo-classic or Greek revival is seen to be fully developed. There is much use of the honeysuckle and the acanthus, the Greek fret, griffins, sphinx, and other nondescript forms obviously employed in an effort to suggest an antique origin. Other more nearly Roman detail appears—swags, wreaths and garlands, lyres, helmets and shields—adapted to the arms, legs, and backs of chairs and sofas. The Empire suggestions include both Roman and Egyptian motifs, while the Gothic examples show a meagerness in their use of tracery, crockets, and a very small variety of detail.

The Romantic origin of this pseudo-Gothic is well typified by Smith's design for a Gothic state bed which, with arched head- and foot-board decorated with tracery and held at the corners between octagonal turrets, is set under a great baldachino with open tracery, niches with figures, fan-vaulted corners, and roof of open flying buttresses meeting in the center. The whole thing is reminiscent of a royal tomb in Westminster Abbey and applies

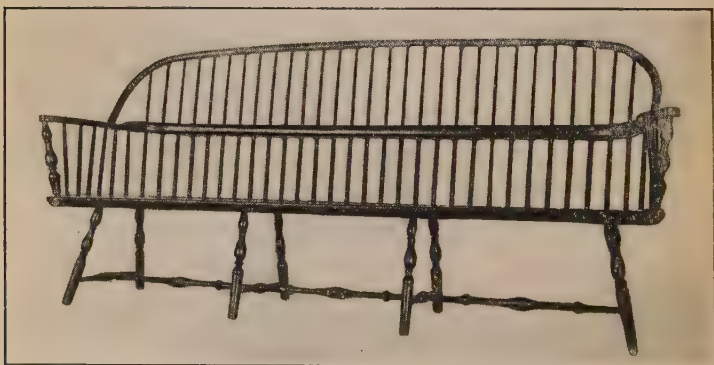


PLATE LIX

A fine Windsor settee and a bird-cage of walnut and wire set
with amethyst-glass corner panels

Artistic Plagiarism

to furniture, details and forms originally meant to have been executed in stone at large size for architectural use.

A few years later, 1823, we come upon "A Series Containing Forty-four Engravings in Colours of Fashionable Furniture," published by R. Ackerman "at his Repository of Arts," headquarters for Ackerman's "Repository of Arts," a current magazine of the day, containing all manner of material of interest to women. There was usually some part devoted each month to household decoration and furnishing. This series of forty-four plates shows many ways of draping windows as well as many pieces of furniture—beds, sofas, hat- and umbrella-racks, flower-stands, ottomans, secretaries, book-cases, chairs, and tables. In these again the perverted Empire and Greek revival styles predominate, only four so-called Gothic pieces being admitted, of which but two have real Gothic detail.

The best treatment of the Gothic furniture-design is found in "Pugin's Gothic Furniture," published also by R. Ackerman. The plates are dated in the years 1825, 1826, and 1827. Here, in many cases, may be seen the hand of a really excellent designer. To be sure, the furniture forms are virtually all

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familiar from the eighteenth century, but their adaptation in terms of Gothic detail has been skilfully done. The delicacy and justness of proportion, the appropriateness of scale, and the integrity of structure of several of Pugin's designs are coupled with very good drawing. The plates include dressing-tables, a grand piano-forte, sideboards, cheval-glass, chairs and tables, beds, flower-stands, candelabra, bookcases, bell-pulls and fire-tools, sofas, bureaus, and fireplaces—all in Gothic ornament. Many of these are of the sort being made well along in the third quarter of the century.

Still another work, "The Practical Cabinet Maker, Upholsterer and Complete Decorator," by Peter and M. A. Nicholson, 1826, shows a large preponderance of the Greek revival style, only two or three Gothic examples figuring in the list. In addition to many sorts of furniture and window treatments, there are presented here well-drawn details at large scale of the Greek revival ornament such as was used, in composition or stucco, on wood-work; or, carved, in wood, was applied to furniture.

This is only a random selection of a few of the English books which influenced the American taste, and from them it will be seen that from 1808 on-

Artistic Plagiarism

ward there is a commingling of the late Sheraton, Empire, Grecian, Roman, and Gothic styles supplemented by some nondescript, upholstered types of chairs and sofas. These pieces were made in all woods—mahogany, rosewood, curly maple, and satinwood, often veneered on pine or oak. They were often decorated with carving, with inlay in contrasting wood, or with brass inlaid or appliqué. Upholstery forms an important part of the design, often predominating over the exposed woodwork. Fringe, galloons, buttons, and tassels are all employed widely, conforming with the draperies of the room.

The whole spirit of this design is eccentric. We can point to little consistency in the treatment of form, as was possible in the eighteenth century, the desire for novelty leading into designs which were often more curious than beautiful.

The supremacy of the machine begins to make itself felt here. A certain amount of turned decoration is seen, a use of moldings and jig-saw work. Veneers of all sorts are employed and glued upon moulded surfaces. The proportions, affected by those of the empire style, tend to heaviness and stolidity, while in the so-called Grecian style the

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use of classic forms is usually possessed of an unpleasant massiveness.

With all of this there were occasional pieces of much charm and distinction, delicate in scale and made by cabinet-makers who preserved the traditions of their craft, using machines for such work only as could be appropriately fashioned by these means, continuing with handiwork where carved decoration was required.

A type of chair, frequently charming, was the Sheraton "fancy chair" made of maple and painted or stenciled with decoration in gold or color. The body color might be chrome yellow, green, brown, black, or cream, the decoration in gold or color contrasting with the body color. The seats were usually caned, sometimes with some use of cane in the back. Other chairs of this group were made in curly maple, with gilded decoration.

Another group of furniture, growing out of the Empire, is in the so-called Beidemeyer style. It originated in Germany with the designs of Beidemeyer, who strove, in adapting the Napoleonic Empire, to create a new and personal style. In many cases this was successfully accomplished, although frequently the massiveness of the furniture



PLATE LX

Three Pennsylvania German slat-back chairs at top, and three
New England Windsor types of the eighteenth century

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is unpleasant. In it was preserved the almost monolithic quality of certain styles of Empire work, with few moldings, the composition being made up of solid cubes, blocks of rectangular form, or other solid geometrical units. The wood was usually light in color,—maple, satinwood, or light mahogany,—the important lines strengthened with inlaid or veneered bands. Other variations, based upon curves, produced much the same effect as did the art-nouveau work of the 1890's.

While all of this welter of innovations was going on, marking a breakdown in the old tradition, the accession of Louis Philippe in France in 1830 gave a new impulse to a revival of older styles in furniture design. With the revival of a monarchy the furniture-designers began to hark back to the monarchical traditions of the eighteenth century, eliminating the Revolutionary and Empire interludes. In order to swing as far as possible away from these, reference was made to the rocaille furniture of the full Louis XV period for the forms which should express the taste of this most recent successor on the throne of France.

Again we have the curvilinear design recalling that of the mid-eighteenth century, the ornament

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of flowing flower and leaf form following the lines of the structure. Only in general idea did this furniture follow the old. It was difficult to eliminate the influences of the intervening years, and these are marked by a change in the proportions, the placing of ornament, the materials used, and the technical methods of carving and molding.

Here we find a considerable use of rosewood and fine walnut. Sometimes mahogany is seen, in many cases enameled or gilded. The furniture made of ebonized wood with ormolu mounts constitutes an elaborate group.

The ordinary furniture of this latter part of the period—from around 1835 to 1850—is the sort with broad veneers of crotch-figured mahogany entirely covering the piece. The forms in many cases are reminiscent of the Empire,—sofas, bureaus, chests of drawers, tables,—with heavy columns, plain veneered surfaces without moldings, and sometimes feet carved into lion paws. Skirtings of tables are molded to a cyma curve; sofas and sleigh beds are curved in the forms of the Empire, with solid sides veneered. Chests of drawers have convex fronts to the upper drawers. Solid columns, or

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others crudely carved in pineapple or leaf forms flank many chests of drawers.

All of these early Victorian forms are found in America virtually contemporaneously. To attempt any accurate outline of chronological development is difficult. As nearly as one may classify this development is to say that, following the simultaneous fashions for late Sheraton, Gothic, Greek and Roman styles, and the derivative of the Empire, came the revival of the monarchical furniture of the period of Louis XV, which shows an admixture of the other treatments immediately preceding it.

An eccentric group of this Louis Philippe period is the black-enameled furniture decorated in gold and color in imitation of lacquer and set with mother-of-pearl. The decoration is purely European and realistic, rococo in the main. A variation of this, in keeping with the mechanical spirit of the age, was the molded papier-mâché furniture, painted in the same fashion.

Some of this furniture is very elaborate, with buildings and figures inlaid in the pearl. Bedroom and drawing-room sets, occasional tables, trays, and screens all came in for such treatment. With few

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exceptions the forms of the furniture are the least pleasing of the designs of the period.

Complementary to this and dating somewhat earlier—from 1825 to 1840—was the Chinese lacquer which was brought home in such quantities by the clipper-ship captains. While purely Oriental in origin, it was made for Western trade and forms a very charming element in the furnishings of the early nineteenth century. Boxes, screens, nests of tables, trays, and candelabra-brackets all were made and formed incidental notes in the rooms.

It will readily be seen why, in the consideration of the development of furniture-design, this period which follows that full expression of the Empire style is seldom treated. For many centuries the tradition of Western art, expressing itself in the utilitarian forms of its furniture, ran through a steady course of genuine development. Styles changed from time to time, now slowly, now with great rapidity, yet in each case a new style grew directly out of its predecessor, through an experimental period of transition when new ideas were being amalgamated with the old. These changes came about through many causes, such as international contacts which introduced new design ideas

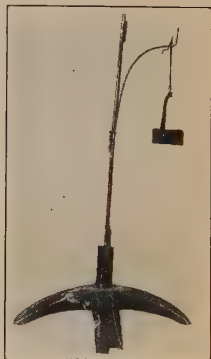


PLATE LXI

Three provincial pieces of the eighteenth century and a
Betty-lamp holder

(Heavy table at left, of early eighteenth century, carries on a
seventeenth-century form)

Artistic Plagiarism

or new materials, changes in customs and manners which affected form, changes in taste which came as a reaction against prevailing modes, or suggestions of especially clever makers working out their own ideas in the old tradition.

In the nineteenth century this large variety of styles was not a direct growth of the old tradition after the development of the Empire. The archæological attitude which is the basis of the Empire is also, perhaps, the cause of the successive phase, in that it created the method of plagiarizing old ideas and reworking them for modern use. The pitfall here is that the unimaginative application of dead fashion to living art is an essential error of thought and of taste. The revival of Gothic, Grecian, or Roman forms applied literally to modern use constitutes an error of taste which even good design and sound workmanship cannot nullify. At best its result is quaint, sometimes charming, but never fine.

On the other hand, this work of the nineteenth century echoes in a very accurate degree the state of mind of contemporary life, when interest in the arts was subsidiary to the interest in science, when mechanical invention successfully applied to certain operations was laying its deadening hand upon

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the work of the artist-craftsman. Interest was less in esthetic values than in the ingenuity with which the machine might do the work of a man or that some manufactured substitute might take the place of some natural material. Thus the period in furniture is interesting chiefly from the point of view of its reflection of the civilization of the time in general, rather than as a continuation of the artistic tradition of the Western world of which it should really form a part.





CHAPTER VII

PROVINCIAL TYPES

THROUGHOUT the study of furniture-development there must be kept in mind a definite distinction between two general groups which differ in their essential quality. The first group which we have discussed in the preceding chapters follows in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a stylistic development reflecting the changes which from time to time have overtaken the arts as they have responded to conditions of the civilizations with which they are associated. This group is a part of the sophisticated taste of the world. The second group consists of the simpler furniture used by the less well-to-do members of the same communities, people whose way of living was uncomplicated and little influenced by the changing fashions of their wealthier compatriots.

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There is an essential and basic difference between the intellectual conceptions behind these two groups of furniture. The makers of the first group were men in touch with the most fashionable taste of their day, catering to rich or well-to-do patrons. They were familiar with the published work of the great designers and with the executed work of the other fine contemporary cabinet-makers. The variety of suggestion in form and decoration on which they could draw was great, the variety of materials in which they could work was rich. Their patrons required types of furniture conformable to their scale of living.

On the other hand was the larger number of people living simply on farms and in villages, or the less well-to-do people of the larger towns. Into the country districts remote from the seaboard the sophisticated taste of the towns did not penetrate. For almost two centuries in America there was a frontier pushing farther and farther westward, which as it advanced left settlements behind it where life was reduced to its simplest terms. The houses of these people through two centuries, were furnished, as their economic condition permitted, for comfort, but with a simplicity which frequently re-

Provincial Types

lied upon local craftsmen and material for the furniture which was made. For the design of this furniture, the craftsmen or cabinet-makers depended upon their memories of the finer things which they had seen, or they strove to follow some locally owned piece which had been brought from afar. The pieces inspired by examples at hand were often much varied from the original, both because of the desire on the part of the workman to exercise his own taste and because of his lack of understanding of the basic qualities of the original design.

Hence this group of so-called provincial furniture, while in some cases possessing a small degree of stylistic quality, is usually more expressive of the special taste and skill of the cabinet-maker, working with limited tools, materials and inspiration, than it is of the general taste of the people. Its utilitarian quality, however, supplies an essential indigent element to its design.

In America, where class distinctions were not unknown and where the line between rich and poor was clearly demarked, there is this parallel series of country or provincial furniture following in the wake of the more stylistic forms which were found

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in the better houses of the larger towns and of the great estates.

This simple, country-made furniture has many good qualities which make it popular among collectors to-day, but it is inaccurate to compare it with the finer sophisticated pieces whose whole spirit is different from its own. It was made either by town workmen who catered to the less well-to-do trade, by local furniture-makers in the more remote districts, or even by the people themselves, for their own use. There were also traveling joiners and chair-makers who went from place to place making these simpler things.

One of the characteristics of the sort of furniture which we call provincial is the use of simple local materials. These vary in different parts of the country. Pine, maple, ash, the nut woods, and the fruit woods are all found, often in combination. In eastern Pennsylvania and farther south a good deal of walnut is met with. Where combinations of wood occur, the harder woods are usually placed where they receive the greatest wear, the softer woods in the most protected places.

The decoration is simple, in conformity with the spirit of the design and the material used. It con-

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sists chiefly of uncomplicated turning and scoring, of a few moldings, of engrailing, which is the cutting of a board's edge to a design, and occasionally a very small amount of carving. Some pieces of furniture have beveled panels with raised fields.

Painting of whole pieces of furniture is rather the rule than the exception. Usually only one solid color is employed—red, black, green, or gray. Less frequently there is painted ornament on a colored background.

The dating of much of this furniture with any degree of accuracy is difficult. There are so few stylistic points to guide us. Where these are present we can at least give a date before which the piece could not have been made. The turned decoration is the chief key and some of the turning can be dated within a quarter of a century. But in general, this furniture was made over long periods of time in much the same design. For example, simple slat-back chairs following the early form but lightened in their elements were made throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth, the Shaker chairs of modern manufacture being a continuation of the form.

All sorts of useful pieces are found, cupboards

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and dressers, chairs, stools, tables, desks, chests of drawers, settles, candle-stands, hutch tables, and beds.

There is a type of little pine cupboard, following in general the great oak cupboard of the seventeenth century. Several examples of this exist, dating from somewhere in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Here the decoration is turning, molding, beveling, and painting.

Wall-cupboards with open shelves and doors below are characteristic of the century. These are simple pieces with molded shelf edges and a beveled paneled door below. Some of them are corner cupboards with a shell treatment at the top or a painted plaster half-dome. The shelves of the corner cupboards are cut in various designs, but virtually all have at the center of the back a circular section on which to stand a bowl, tea-pot, or jar. These cupboards may be either with or without a door, solid or glazed.

Similar in detail to the cupboards are the dressers. These usually have one or more doors below the counter and open shelves above. A cornice of moldings finishes the top. The vertical boards of the side into which the shelves fit are cut to a profile

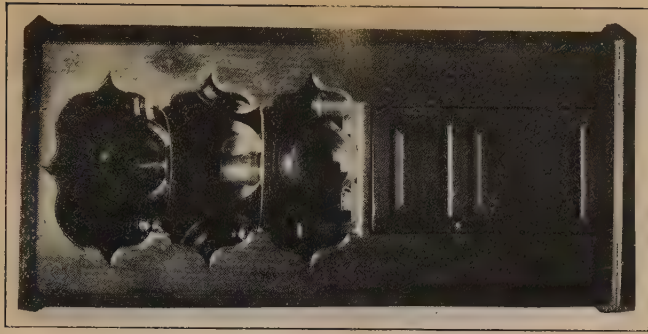
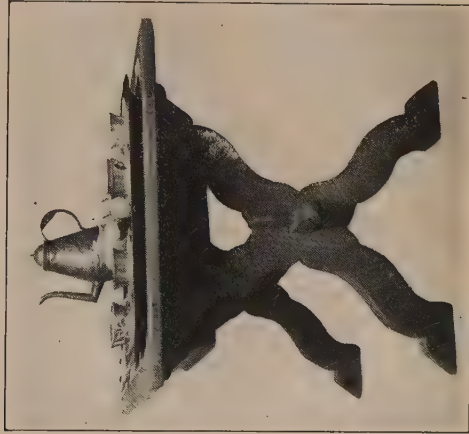


PLATE LXII

A saw-buck table and two corner cupboards—all of Pennsylvania German origin

Provincial Types

of curves, in some cases quite beautifully designed. The shelf edges are usually molded with an inverted thumb-nail mold and the counter edge is rounded or molded. Pine is the usual material for these dressers and cupboards, although cherry and maple are found in the cupboards. Those dating from the middle of the eighteenth century to the last decade are likely to be uncarved and to have little or no formal architectural treatment. Some of the later ones have gouge carving or crude fluted pilasters.

Of the chairs, we find renditions of several of the traditional types. The slat-back, the turned spindle, the wainscot, the banister-back of the earlier period—all bring in their suggestion. Varieties of chairs made all through the eighteenth century repeat these forms to some extent, but treat them in a manner quite different from their original method. When we get into the stylistic period of the eighteenth century we find the early Georgian forms with solid base or violin splat, and the openwork splat of the Chippendale period all rendered in the vernacular of simple technique and local woods.

The best-known group of chairs of the sort are the so-called Windsor chairs. The typically Amer-

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ican treatment of the Windsor chair ran all through the eighteenth century and well on into the nineteenth. Differing from the English treatment, it presents a lightness and grace in the best examples. The English chairs frequently have an openwork splat in the middle of the back, and their turnings are different from the American. Windsor chairs were made from as early as 1725 in Philadelphia, and would seem in the other cities of the Atlantic seaboard to have been the province of a special chair-maker. They were made in arm and side types, some with a widened arm for writing, with a small drawer beneath either the arm or the seat.

The Windsor chair is made up of a saddle seat, whose surface is modeled for comfort, turned legs inserted in the bottom of the seat and braced by turned stretchers, a back with bent frame into which is set a series of turned spindles, fitted into the back of the seat. There are many variations, some with the hoop of the back curving toward the front to form arms which rest on the turned spindles. Another type, and a later in date, has a series of spindles of equal height supporting a solid horse-shoe curved piece which forms the arms and continues around the back. A second series of tall

Provincial Types

spindles runs through it at the back, forming a high back topped with a bow-shaped cresting originating from the same source as the Chippendale cresting. The comb-back Windsor of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century is a variety of this, with a narrow section of the back projecting higher than the regular cresting.

Settees of Windsor form usually have spindles of the same height, with the heavy board on top forming a back and arms at the same distance from the floor.

A very few tables with construction and turning like the Windsor chairs are known and are particularly charming exemplars of the group.

These chairs were usually made of combined woods, the seats of pine or other soft wood, the spindles of hickory, and the bent-wood portions of hickory or white oak. They were commonly painted gray or green and were used as porch or garden furniture as well as in the houses. They bear peculiarly the indigenous quality of American handicraft, the virtue of practicality and lightness, and that much-sought-after solution of the designer, the maximum strength with the greatest economy of material. The turned spindle chair was not usual

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in the eighteenth century. It is, however, found in eastern Pennsylvania, where the turnings are enlivened by a bit of gouge-work. Some of these turned spindle chairs follow the form of Carver chairs rather closely. In eastern Pennsylvania the old types seem to have carried on unusually long—well through the third quarter of the eighteenth century. There are certain solid wood-backed chairs closely reminiscent of the wainscot chair, with carved or silhouetted cresting. Most of these Pennsylvania German types dating after the mid-eighteenth century drew their inspiration directly from the continent of Europe, and do not connect up with the styles of the furniture of the other colonies.

Much painted decoration in gay colors, gouge and other simple carving is found there. The peculiar detail—scrolls, birds, hearts, animals, etc.—is characteristically Teutonic, sentimental, and of a peasant type. Its charm and decorative quality are great, although its character is more European than American in many respects.

The bridal chests of the Pennsylvania Germans are particularly pleasant work. The construction is usually very simple, of boards dovetailed at the



PLATE LXIII

A bride's box, a tiny corner key-cabinet, and a fine painted chest of Pennsylvania German origin

Provincial Types

corners. Their decoration is painted in gay colors, red, green, black, blue, and white. Most of the chests bear the initials of the bride or her full name, and the date is customarily used. The majority of these chests date from the last thirty or forty years of the eighteenth century.

All sorts of furniture in this Pennsylvania peasant type were made. There were wall-cupboards and corner cupboards, benches, chairs, tables, and chests, all bearing the characteristic treatments of carved or painted ornament. Much of the local effort was put upon charming and intimate small things such as work-boxes, pipe-holders, tobacco-boxes, and spice-cupboards. Here we have an almost complete transference of European peasant art to America. Its expression is in terms of the usefulness of the pieces made and in their decoration, which bears the imprint of their Rhenish origin.

To come back again to chairs, the last type and an interesting one, is the banister-back with solid cresting, turned posts, and under-structure. This was very usual, particularly in New England, made of maple, whitewood, and other local materials, the seats rush or splint, and with turning as their only decoration.

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There are many charming little tables with turned legs joined with a low stretcher, and with tops round, oval, and rectangular in maple or pine. The legs are set at a rake for stability and the shallow skirting is scalloped. Gate-leg and drop-leaf tables, too, are not uncommon and carry on well through the century. The turnings of the legs differentiate them from the true seventeenth-century types.

Candle-stands with three short legs of a crude sort have a threaded central part on which the top may be adjusted up and down. Others have fixed tops. The construction is primitive, with legs fitted into a sort of core at the base, and the vertical pedestal rises from the upper side of this support.

Hutch tables and chair tables in pine compose another series of this unsophisticated furniture. Here the tops are round or rectangular, the understructure built up of boards. In some the arms are plain board, a continuation of the sides, in others they are framed with turned posts and a horizontal arm-piece cut to a curve.

Desks there are of numerous sorts. The transitional forms with the slant-top box with pigeon-holes set upon a framework, with or without a

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drawer, is a desirable type. Regular slant-top desks with fall leaf are made in pine, maple, cherry, and other simple woods. Chests of drawers of all types, chests-on-chest and other case furniture such as high-boys and low-boys are all found, simply rendered in less fine woods than the mahogany or walnut, and with somewhat crude, broadly carved fans and sunbursts on the lower or upper small drawers.

The high-boys of this class are generally flat-topped.

Many simple beds of maple, whitewood, cherry, and pine were made with square, round, or octagonal posts which taper slightly toward the top. These were made both with tall posts and as camp-beds with curved canopy. Some of them have turned decorations.

When we reach the nineteenth century, we find these provincial types more directly influenced by stylistic changes. Many of the old types continue, the slat back chairs, the simple tables in Sheraton form, the chests of drawers, the desks, and the stools. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century we see the influence of the French Empire at work. To imitate the gilt-bronze ormolu appliqués of that magnificent furniture, there is the painted

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and stenciled furniture of this time. At first the designs are directly copied from the Empire in gold paint on black and green backgrounds. Eventually they developed into the freer decoration of the early Victorian period, with grapes and leaves, fruits and flowers following the general form bordered by narrow lines outlining panels.

With the introduction of mechanical methods of manufacture, the difference between the provincial furniture and its finer cousin became more pronounced. There were excellent cabinet-makers and carvers working well into the century, whose craftsmanship was unimpaired by the change in taste. On the other hand, there were many manufacturing concerns turning out in quantity production pieces of comparatively small merit.

Painted and stenciled furniture had a large vogue in the country districts. Chairs particularly were made in great numbers, typical among them being those made by Lambert Hitchcock, who worked at Hitchcockville (now Riverton), Connecticut. His business, from small beginnings, grew to very prosperous proportions. There were several factories such as his in New England, turning out this inexpensive and rather gaudy furniture.

Provincial Types

Contemporary with this stenciled and painted furniture were other pieces such as tables of many sorts, chests of drawers, looking-glasses, clocks, rocking-chairs, and cupboards. They were made of maple or of cherry and other fruit woods.

In making the distinction which we have between the two groups of furniture differing in the sophistication of their designs and manufacture, it should be pointed out that in the first period, up to the beginning of the eighteenth century, this difference did not exist in American work. All of the finer seventeenth-century pieces in America were modeled upon the really sophisticated English work of the day, so that the idea behind them was more pretentious than their final effect. On the other hand, the limitation of tools and mechanical equipment did simplify the result, giving a certain primitive quality which at times is suggestive of provincial work. It is chiefly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when, parallel with the stylistic development seen in the finer furniture, there runs this development of utilitarian forms, made of local woods by methods of almost primitive character, that the differences are clearly marked between that work which is based upon a considerable knowl-

Early American Furniture

edge of the best furniture design and that based upon utilitarian necessity interpreted in terms of the craftsman's personal taste and simple methods of working. Lw



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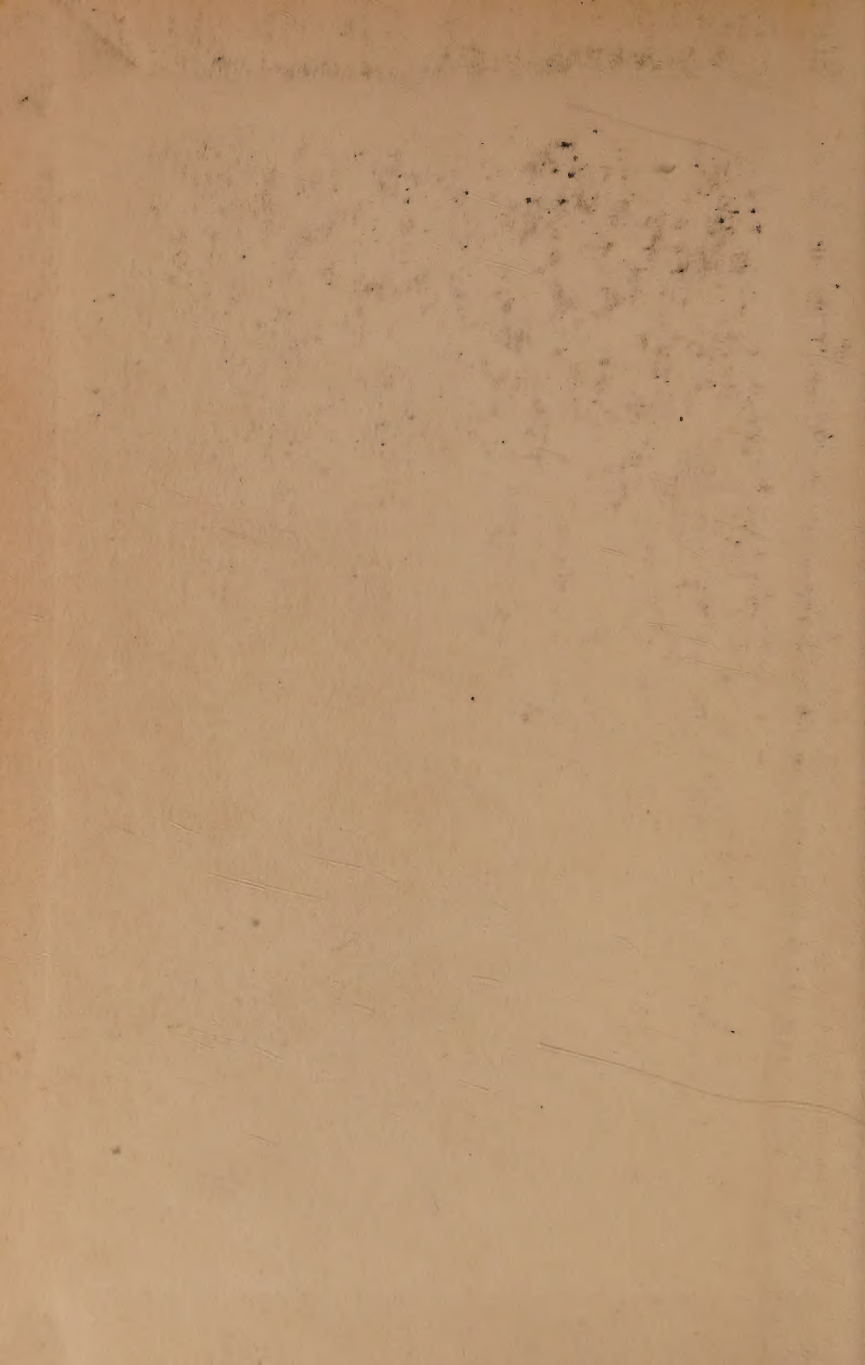
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